

THE LIVES OF THE TWELVE

A Look at the Social and Political Lives
of the Twelve Infallible Imams ('a)

Written By
Shaykh Mahdī Pīshvā'ī

•PART THREE•

A LOOK AT THE LIVES OF IMAM KAZIM ('a),
IMAM REZA ('a), AND IMAM JAWAD ('a)

Translated By
Sayyid Ali Musawi

The Lives of the Twelve is a pioneering work that details the lives of the Twelve Shia Imams. While most works on the Twelve Imams focuses on the basics of their lives, this text goes into the details of their social and political lives and how they affected change throughout their societies. Through extensive research, Shaykh Mahdi Pishvai has been able to craft together many details which were not widely known before. This is the first time a book of this caliber has been published in the English language. Today, we live in times where morality and a sense of right and wrong have all but disappeared. In light of this, we can turn to the teachings and wisdom of the Twelve in order to see how we can help bring back morality and that human sense of differentiating between right and wrong in our society. This work is composed of four distinct volumes, each of which goes into the lives of three of the Twelve Imams.



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(Part Three)

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Translated By: Sayyid Ali Musawi

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Preface and Acknowledgments

-By Sayyid Ali Musawi

In the name of God, the All-Beneficent, the Ever Merciful

Oftentimes, the work on the lives of the Twelve Imams (‘a) tend to be strictly biographical in nature and they do not deal with the social or political aspects of their lives. This book primarily summarizes the biographical aspects of their lives and it delves into the details of how they worked to spread the true teachings of the religion of Islam throughout their societies. Indeed, we are indebted to these Twelve Guides; without their teachings and their guidance, we would have been plunged into the depths of darkness.

Although this book began as a project many long years ago, it has finally reached completion today, February 2, 2019. We thank God for his blessings which weigh heavy on us and we ask that he guides us in his path and that he allows us to be more perfect in serving him. Truly, nothing is possible except

through God.

I would like to extend my gratitude and thanks to my parents, who have been so integral all of these years in teaching and guiding me. I would also like to thank everyone who has been a part of this journey thus far, particularly my teachers in the religious seminary of Qum, Iran. My years there proved invaluable to who I am today and I would not trade them for anything in this world. I would also like to thank the members of the Noor Collective in San Diego, California for creating the platform which inspired this publication. Finally, I would like to thank Issa K. for his help in the final editing of this manuscript, as well as Haider al-Shaher for his work on the cover page. May we all be worthy one day to call ourselves the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a)...

Sayyid Ali Musawi

February 2, 2019

San Diego, California

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Part Three: A Look at the Lives of
Imam Kāẓim, Imam Riḍā, and Imam
Jawād

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The Seventh Imam

Imam Mūsā Kāẓim



A Brief Look into the Life of the Imam

The first name of the Seventh Imam is Mūsā, while he was also known by the title of al-Kāẓim. His mother was a virtuous lady by the name of Ḥamīdah and his father was the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq ('a). The Imam was born in the year 128 Hijrī in an area called Abwā', one of the outlying areas of Medina. He was ultimately martyred in the year 183 (or 186) Hijrī.

Caliphs Who Ruled during the Life of the Imam

From the year 148 Hijrī, when Imam Ṣādiq ('a) attained martyrdom, the imamate of Imam Kāẓim ('a) began. Imam Kāẓim lived contemporarily with the following caliphs:

- 1- Maṣṣūr Dawānīqī (136-158 Hijrī)
- 2- Muḥammad, better known as Mahdī (158-169 Hijrī)
- 3- Hādī (169-170 Hijrī)
- 4- Hārūn (170-193 Hijrī)

At the time of the martyrdom of Imam Ṣādiq ('a), Maṣṣūr Dawānīqī, the tyrannical 'Abbāsīd caliph, was at the peak of his power and influence. Maṣṣūr was known for killing a large number of people for the sake of strengthening and stabilizing the foundations of his government. He not only persecuted the Shias, but also the jurisprudents and notable personalities of the Sunni sect who opposed him. Abū Ḥanīfah, the founder of the Sunni Hanafī sect, was lashed and imprisoned for the crime of supporting a man named Ibrāhīm with a religious ruling. Ibrāhīm was the son of 'Abdullah Maḥḍ, and the leader of an anti-'Abbāsīd uprising in Iraq.¹

After his father passed away, Imam Kāẓim ('a) was faced with this oppressive individual as the uncontested ruler of the Muslim nation while he was only 25 years old. When Maṣṣūr learned about the passing of Imam Ṣādiq ('a)

¹ 'Abd al-Raḥmān Suyūṭī, Tārīkh al-Khūlafāh, Baghdad, Maktabah al-Muthannā, p. 259.

through Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān, the governor of Medina, he wrote a letter to his governor, saying: "If Ja'far ibn Muḥammad has nominated a successor for himself, summon him and cut off his head."

It was not long after this that the governor of Medina sent the following response to Baghdad: "In his official will, Ja'far ibn Muḥammad has nominated five individuals as his successors. These five are:

- 1- The caliph, Manṣūr Dawānīqī
- 2- Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān, the governor of Medina
- 3- 'Abdullah ibn Ja'far ibn Muḥammad, the elder brother of Imam Kāẓim ('a)
- 4- Mūsā ibn Ja'far ('a)
- 5- Ḥamīdah, the wife of the Imam ('a)."

The governor then asked which of these five he should kill. Manṣūr, who had never imagined that he would face such a situation, became enraged and replied: "It is not possible to kill them."

This official will of the Imam ('a) was written in this way for an important reason. Imam Ṣādiq ('a) had previously introduced the next Imam, Imam Kāẓim ('a), to certain individuals from among his followers, as well as to his family members. Since he was aware of Manṣūr's evil intentions, he wrote such a will in order to protect the life of the Seventh Imam ('a) and disrupt Manṣūr's plans.

The Guardian of the Ja'farī University

Gauging the situation and circumstances of that time revealed that any overt political activity would be met with a severe reaction on the part of Manṣūr's government—naturally this was not advisable. It was for this reason that Imam Kāẓim ('a) followed the plan of action of his father and established a school through which he could educate the Muslims. This school was not as large as his fathers, but it proved to be quite influential in its own way.

Sayyid ibn Ṭāwūs has written: "A large group of the

companions and select followers of Imam Kāẓim (‘a), as well as notable individuals from the Hāshimīs, would gather around the Imam (‘a) and write down his valuable words and his answers to various questions which people would ask him. They would also record his religious edicts on incidents which had taken place.”² Sayyid Amīr ‘Alī has written: “In the year 148, Imam Ja‘far Ṣādiq (‘a) passed away in the city of Medina. Luckily, his school did not close, and continued under the leadership of his son and successor, Mūsā ibn Ja‘far (‘a).”³

Mūsā ibn Ja‘far (‘a) was not only superior to all of the scholars and men of science in terms of his knowledge, but he was also superior in terms of his behavior and ethics. He was famously known among the common people, as well as among the notables, for his lofty characteristics. All of the scholars who are familiar with his life history pay tribute to his characteristics and attributes.

Ibn Ḥajar Haytamī, the famous Sunni scholar and narrator of tradition, has written: “Mūsā Kāẓim was the inheritor of the knowledge and sciences of his father, and possessed his virtues and perfections. He was given the title Kāẓim due to his forgiveness, overlooking nature, and the extraordinary forbearance which he showed when dealing with ignorant people. During his time, no one was able to reach him in terms of divine teachings, knowledge, and magnanimity.”⁴

² Ḥajj Shaykh ‘Abbās Qummi, *Al-Anwār al-Bahīah*, Mashhad, Mu‘assasah’ Manshūrāt Dīnī Mashhad, p. 170.

³ Sayyid Amīr ‘Alī, *A Short History of the Arabs*, translated by: ‘Afīf al-Ba‘albakī, Second Edition, Dār al-‘Ilm Lil Malāyīn, 1967 A.D., p. 209.

⁴ *Al-Sawā‘iq al-Muḥriqah*, Cairo, Maktabah Cairo, p. 203.

The Dark Record of the Caliphate during the Time of Imam Kāzīm

1- Mahdī 'Abbāsī

The dark rule of Maṣṣūr, which had extended its shadow of fear over the entire Islamic nation, finally came to an end with his death. At long last, the people were able to breathe freely again. After him, his son Muḥammad, who was known as Mahdī, took on the reins of power. Mahdī's rule was at first greeted warmly by the masses, for he initially presented himself in a way which drew the people to him. He gave the order for a general pardon of all political prisoners, which also included many Hāshimīs who had been imprisoned. He also put an end to the killings, torture, and harassment of the people which had been common during his predecessor's rule. He returned all of the liquid assets (such as money), as well as non-liquid assets (such as homes and land) which his father Maṣṣūr had seized from the people. Moreover, he divided much of the wealth of the public treasury freely amongst the people.⁵

According to the writings of Maṣ'ūdī, the famous historian, Maṣṣūr had seized approximately 600 million dirhams and 400 million dinars of wealth. This was aside from the wealth he amassed in the form of taxes levied on farm lands.⁶ This wealth was collected and kept in one place, under the title of 'The Public Treasury of Injustice', and each parcel of wealth had its owner's name on it. Due to this small detail, Mahdī was able to separate this treasure trove of wealth and return it back to its rightful owners. In some cases, the owners had already passed away, so it was then returned to their inheritors.⁷

⁵ Ibn Waḍīh, *The History of Ya'qūbī*, Najaf, Maṣṣūrāt al-Maktabah al-Ḥaydarīa, vol. 3, p. 132.

⁶ Maṣ'ūdī, *Marwaj al-Dhahab*, Beirut, Dār al-'Andalūs, vol. 3, p. 312.

⁷ Sayyid Amīr 'Alī, *A Short History of the Arabs*, translated by: 'Afīf al-Ba'albakī, Second Edition, Dār al-'Ilm Lil Malāyīn, 1967 A.D., p. 213.

Perhaps one of the reasons behind such actions by Maḥdī was that when he began his rule, all of the revolts by the Alawīs had already been crushed by Maṣṣūr, and a period of relative calm had been established. Maḥdī did not fear rebellion in the same way that his father had. In any case, this newfound economic freedom, security, and ease brought about the satisfaction of various social groups, and it injected new economic and social life into the nation. If this program had continued, it would have shown extremely positive results. Unfortunately, it was not long before the political situation reversed itself and the new caliph showed his true colors by reviving the policies of the previous caliphs with fresh vigor.

The Center of Debauchery and Corruption

Maḥdī, following in the fashion of Maṣṣūr (who had a very dry and unyielding personality), did not allow any corrupt individuals into his court. He also distanced himself from grandiose banquets and feasts, whereas it was a normal occurrence in the palaces of his predecessors. He always stayed away from gatherings of singing, drinking, and vain amusement.

Yet, before one year had passed, all of this changed and he began to engage in hedonism and wild parties. In essence, he began to act in the same way that the previous caliphs had acted. He also had an extraordinary inclination towards court jesters, and however much he was advised and admonished by his well-wishers of the evil consequences of his newfound lifestyle, he did not pay any heed. He engaged in these actions to such excess that he would not even listen to the counsel and advice of his trusted vizier, Ya'qūb ibn Dāwūd. This was in spite of the fact that he would never deviate from the advice of Ya'qūb in his administrative and managerial decisions, and he would apply his recommendations with complete faith.

While all of this was taking place, Ya'qūb was tormented

by the corruption and pleasure seeking he was witnessing in the royal court. When he saw the current situation where wine was openly being drunk in the palace of the Islamic caliphate, he would say: "Is it for the sake of these actions that you have entailed the responsibility of viziership to me and nominated me for this position? Is it right, that after five prayers in congregation at the central mosque, you now come and sit at a table covered with wine?" Yet the court jesters, who had become accustomed to passing their days merrymaking using public money, only ridiculed these words of Ya'qūb, and encouraged Maḥdī towards drinking even more alcohol. Sometimes, they would compose verses of poetry, saying: "Leave Ya'qūb and his words and become as one with the wine."⁸

The lifestyle of Maḥdī began to cause changes within the Muslim society, and an atmosphere of corruption and recklessness began to become ever more prevalent. As the corruption spread, and the quality and level of modesty and hastity began to be affected, the voices of the elders and the notables began to rise in protest.⁹ The caliph, who was engrossed in his own self-indulgence, was not aware of the social situation, and as a result, corruption and bribery became rampant, and tax officials used their positions to make life difficult for the people. The caliph made the situation even more difficult by taxing the merchants of Baghdad for the first time,¹⁰ as well as entangling the farmers in various bureaucratic difficulties and hardships.¹¹

⁸ Ibn Athīr, *Al-Kāmil Fī Tārīkh*, Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, vol. 6, p. 73.

- Ibn Ṭaḥṭaḡā, *al-Fakhrī*, Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, 1386 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 185.

⁹ Sharīf al-Qarshī, Bāqir, *Ḥayāt al-Imam Mūsā ibn Ja'far* (a), Second Edition, Najaf, Maṭba'at al-Ādāb, 1389 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 436.

¹⁰ Ibn Wāḍih, *The History of Ya'qūbī*, Najaf, *Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Ḥaydariya*, vol. 3, p. 137.

¹¹ Sharīf al-Qarshī, Bāqir, *Ḥayāt al-Imam Mūsā ibn Ja'far* (a), Second Edition, Najaf, Maṭba'at al-Ādāb, 1389 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 442.

Mahdī's Harsh Treatment towards the Alawīs

The behavior and actions of Mahdī were usually different from those of his father, Maṣṣūr, but with respect to how he treated the Alawīs, his actions and policies mirrored those of his father completely. Mahdī would not refrain from any chance of harassing and oppressing the Alawīs. At times, this treatment surpassed even Mansurs in its severity and extreme nature. Since Mahdī saw the descendants of 'Alī ('a) as being dangerous to his government, he was continuously on watch to strike down any movement led by them, and he would actively combat any inclination from the people towards the Shia, and likewise any cooperation with the Alawī leaders.

Historians have written: "When Qāsim ibn Majāshi Tamīmī was passing away, he wrote a will, and sent it to Mahdī for a signature. Mahdī began to read the will, but when he reached a line where Qāsim had written down his Islamic beliefs and had mentioned the oneness of God, the prophethood of Muḥammad (ṣ), and then continued by writing of 'Alī ('a), declaring him as the Imam and successor of the Prophet (ṣ), he threw the will on the ground in anger and did not finish reading it."¹²

The Prohibition of Wine in the Quran

Another example of Mahdī's opposition to Shia teachings is found in an exchange of words he had with Imam Kāẓim ('a) in the city of Medina. One year, Mahdī entered Medina, and after visiting the grave of the Prophet (ṣ), he visited Imam Kāẓim ('a). In order to supposedly test the Imam's ('a) breadth of knowledge, he began a discussion about wine, as mentioned in the Quran. He asked: "Has wine been prohibited in the Holy Quran? The majority of people know that drinking wine has been prohibited, but they do not know whether the meaning of this prohibition is an absolute forbiddance or simply a recommendation."

¹² Ibn Athīr, *Al-Kāmil Fī Tārīkh*, Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, vol. 6, p. 84.

The Imam ('a) replied: "Indeed, the absolute prohibition of wine has been mentioned explicitly in the Holy Quran." Maḥdī asked: "Where in the Quran?" The Imam ('a) replied: "It is where God says: 'Say: the things that my Lord has indeed forbidden are: shameful deeds, whether open or secret; sins and trespasses against truth or reason...'"¹³ The Imam ('a) then mentioned a few other issues which were prohibited in this verse and said: "The meaning of the word 'Ithm' in this verse which has been prohibited, is that of wine, because God says in another verse: 'They ask you concerning wine and gambling. Say: In them is great sin (Ithmun Kabīr), and some profit for men; but the sin is greater than the profit.'"¹⁴

Then he continued and said: "The 'Ithm' which has been explicitly introduced as being forbidden in Surah 'Arāf, has been used in Surah Baqarah in regards to wine and gambling; therefore, the Holy Quran has explicitly forbidden wine." Maḥdī was deeply affected by the logic of the Imam ('a); he suddenly looked at 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn and said: "By God, this ruling is a Hāshimī ruling." 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn replied: "We thank God that he has placed this knowledge in you, the family of the Prophet."¹⁵ When the caliph heard this, he became exceedingly angry, and while trying his best to hide his rage, he said: "You speak the truth, oh Rāfiḍī."^{16 17}

2- Hādī 'Abbāsī

The year 169 Hijrī was a very chaotic and difficult time in Islamic history. In this year, Maḥdī 'Abbāsī passed away and his son Hādī succeeded the caliphate. Hādī was a young man who was known for his arrogance, inexperience, and pleasure

¹³ Surah 'Arāf, Verse 33.

¹⁴ Surah Baqarah, Verse 219.

¹⁵ It was perhaps his intention, that due to the family relationship which existed between the Banī 'Abbās and the Banī Hāshim, the knowledge and learning of Imam Kāzim (a) would be a cause of pride for Maḥdī.

¹⁶ The term Rāfiḍī means "those who reject." It was used as a disparaging term for the Shia since they were considered to have rejected the "Sunnah" of the Prophet.

¹⁷ Kulaynī, Al-Furū Min al-Kāfi, Tehran, Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyah, vol. 6, p. 406.

seeking nature. This event initiated the beginning of many bitter episodes for the Muslim world.

At the same time, it must be mentioned that the rule of Hādī in comparison to that of his father, was not really the main problem that the Muslim nation faced. It had been a long time that the tyrannical caliphs had been succeeding one another in a hereditary fashion; during this time, the caliphate was either passed down within the Umayyid family or within the 'Abbāsīd family. This had gone on for so long that it had become normal for the people.

What was relatively new and dangerous was that the destiny of the Muslim nation had now been passed on to a young man who was inexperienced, incompetent, whimsical, and self-indulgent. When Hādī reached the position of the caliphate, he was no older than 25 years in age.¹⁸ From a moral and behavioral perspective, he was by no means fit for the position. Hādī was a rash individual who drank wine, and was so undisciplined, that even after reaching the caliphate, he could not restrain himself from his past habits. He would not bother to keep up the outer appearances of Islam, which the position of the caliphate required.¹⁹

In addition to this, he was a cold hearted individual who was known for his short temper and ill manners.²⁰ Hādī had been raised and trained in the court of the 'Abbāsīds from childhood, and as a result, he had absorbed the long established Abbasid characteristics of selfishness, tyranny, and brutality from his very first days. The entirety of the Abbasid dynasty was such that even if the caliphate had not fallen into the hands of Hādī himself, it would have ended up in the hands of other people who had been raised with the exact same principles.

¹⁸ Mas'ūdī, *Marwaj al-Dhahab*, Beirut, Dār al-'Andalūs, vol. 3, p. 324.

¹⁹ Mas'ūdī, *Marwaj al-Dhahab*, Beirut, Dār al-'Andalūs, vol. 3, p. 325.

- Abū al-Faraj al-Isfihānī, *al-Aghānī*, Beirut, Dār Ahya' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, vol. 5, p. 184.

²⁰ Abul Raḥmān Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafā*, Baghdad, Maktabah al-Muthannā, p. 279.

Disgraceful Parties

During the caliphate of his father, Hādī 'Abbāsī and his brother, Hārūn, would invite singers to their royal feasts and parties. All of these events were naturally funded with money from the public treasury. They would then engage in wine-drinking and revelry. Hādī would go to such excess in these matters, that sometimes his father Maḥdī would lose his patience and punish his favorite singers and court jesters.²¹ This went on to such an extent that Ibrāhīm Muṣalī, a famous singer of that time, was prohibited from performing at Hādī's parties and feasts. In spite of this prohibition, Hādī would simply not take no for an answer, and as a result, Ibrāhīm Muṣalī was thrown in prison on the orders of the caliph.²²

During other instances, Hādī was faced with the opposition of his father due to his repulsive and obscene behavior. Unfortunately, after reaching the caliphate, he was completely free to act as he wished, and he moved forward in spending the wealth of the Muslim nation on nightly parties and feasts. According to historians, Hādī would invite Ibrāhīm Muṣalī to his court and spend hour after hour listening to his songs. He was so attached to him that he would pay him large sums of money. On just one day alone, he gifted him 150,000 dinars. Ibrāhīm's son would oftentimes say: "If Hādī had lived longer, we would have built the walls of our home out of gold and silver."²³

It has been narrated that one day, Ibrāhīm Muṣalī sang several bawdy songs for Hādī, and the caliph enjoyed them greatly. Hādī encouraged him to sing them once more. At the conclusion of the party, he told one of his court officials to take Ibrāhīm by the hand and to lead him to the door of the public treasury. There, Ibrāhīm was permitted to take as

²¹ Ibn Athīr, *Al-Kāmil Fi Tārikh*, Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, vol. 6, p. 102.

²² Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfihānī, *al-Aghānī*, Beirut, Dār Aḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, vol. 5, p. 160.

²³ Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfihānī, *Ibid*, vol. 5, p. 163.

much money as he desired. It has to be understood that this was not the caliph's personal wealth— it was money which belonged to the people. He mentioned that even if Ibrāhīm wished to take all of what the public treasury contained, he was free to do so. Ibrāhīm later said: "I entered the public treasury and only took 50,000 dinars."²⁴

Through such actions and behavior, it was evidently clear that Hādī was not capable of taking on the leadership role of the Muslim world. It was for this very reason that while Hādī had initially inherited a relatively calm and obedient population to rule over, he was soon faced with an agitated and vengeful populace. From every corner of the Muslim world, protests began to pop up.

While there were many reasons for this anger, one of the main reasons was Hādī's persecution of the Hāshimīs and the descendants of Imam 'Alī ('a). From the very beginning of his rule, he placed the Hāshimīs under extreme pressure and cut off the stipends and wages they had been receiving during the time of the previous caliph. The Hāshimīs were dealt with like criminals, and an atmosphere of terror and intimidation was brought upon them. The caliph would order his agents throughout the nation to have them arrested wherever they were found and sent to Baghdad where they could be kept under close surveillance.²⁵

The Bloody Tragedy in the Land of Fakh

These types of pressures angered the Hāshimīs and caused them to begin resisting the unrelenting harassment of the 'Abbāsid government. The tyranny and oppression which they were subjected to, planted the seeds of a revolutionary movement and this movement began to gain momentum and strength. The leadership of this movement was taken up by one of the grandsons of Imam Ḥasan al-Mujtabā ('a), by the

²⁴ Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfihānī, *Ibid*, vol. 5, p. 185.

²⁵ Ibn Wāḍih, *The History of Ya'qūbī*, Najaf, Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Ḥaydariya, 1384 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 3, p. 142.

name of Ḥusayn Sāhib Fakh.²⁶

Although the time had not yet come for the revolt to be started (the Ḥajj season had been selected as the specified time), the persecution of the governor of Medina proved to be so unbearable that the flames of revolt were lit before the set time had arrived. Historical records have shown that the governor of Medina was known to be a staunch enemy of the family of the Prophet. In order to show himself as being worthy of his position and of properly serving the central government, he would use any possible excuse to summon, on a daily basis, the notables from among the Hāshimīs.

These men were forced to assemble every day in the office of the governor and introduce themselves. The governor did not settle for just this— he also made each of them personal guarantors for one another, and if one of them was not present for any reason, the other individual would be arrested as a result.²⁷ One day, Ḥusayn Sāhib Fakh and Yaḥyā ibn ‘Abdullah were both arrested and held as virtual hostages simply because one of the notables from the Hāshimīs was not present. This deliberate power play by the governor proved to be too much and as a result, the rebellion was started before its set date.

Who was the Marytr of Fakh?

The leader of this rebellion was Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, the grandson of Imam Ḥasan al-Mujtabā (‘a); he later became famously known as “The Martyr of Fakh.” He was one of the prominent men from the Hāshimīs, and was known for his virtue, courage, generosity, and magnanimity. He was also

²⁶ Ḥusayn Sāhib Fakh’s name was Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥasan ibn Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Since he was killed fighting against the army of the Abbasid caliph in a land called Fakh, he became famously known as Sāhib Fakh or The Martyr of Fakh.

²⁷ Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, Beirut, Dār al-Qamūs al-Ḥadīth, vol. 10, p. 25.

- Abū al-Faraj al-Isfihānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, Najaf, Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Ḥaydarīa, 1385 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 294-295.

- Ibn Athīr, *Al-Kāmil Fi Tārīkh*, Beirut, Dār Sadir, vol. 6, p. 90.

widely known in the society of his time as an exceptional individual.²⁸ He was born from a mother and father who were also known for their virtue and purity to the point that they were called Zawju Ṣāliḥ. His entire family was in fact known for their exceptional virtue, piety, and courage.

Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī's father, grandfather, uncles, as well as other members of his family, were all killed by Maṣṣūr Dawiniqi. This wholesale slaughter, which killed so many of their family members, caused them much grief and sorrow.²⁹ Ḥusayn, who had been raised and nurtured in such a family, never forgot the memory of the martyrdom of his father and other family members at the hands of Maṣṣūr's executioners.

The memory of their murder gave him a spirit of courage and bravery in opposing the 'Abbāsids, while their very existence tormented him. Yet, due to the circumstances and conditions of his time, he had no choice but to quietly wait for an opportunity to strike. In time, as he witnessed more and more of the tyranny and oppression of Hādī 'Abbāsī and the governor of Medina, his patience wore thin and he decided to rise up in revolt against the 'Abbāsids.

The Defeat of the Revolt

As soon as Ḥusayn revolted, a large group of the Hāshimīs and the people of Medina pledged allegiance to him, and began to battle against the government forces of Hādī who were in the area. After they forced the government forces to retreat, they used the span of several days to reorganize their forces and march towards Mecca. In Mecca, they intended to use the Ḥajj pilgrimage and the combined mass of the

²⁸ After the martyrdom of Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, when his severed head was brought to Medina, the seventh Imam (a) was affected deeply by the scene, and he said the following with grief and sadness: "I swear by God that he was a righteous Muslim. He would fast and pray a great deal, and fight against corruption and impurity. He would do his duty in regards to commanding the good and forbidding the evil. He was without equal among his own family." (Abū al-Faraj al-Isfihānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyin*, Najaf, *Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Haydariya*, 1385 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 302)

²⁹ Abū al-Faraj al-Isfihānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyin*, Najaf, *Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Haydariya*, 1385 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 285.

Muslims, who were present at the annual rite, in order to make the city their main base of operations.

Once they had taken control of the city, they planned to expand their movement and take further territory. Soon, news of the Medina revolt and the movement of the rebel army towards Mecca reached Hādī. Hādī, in turn, sent an army to quell the rebellion. At the land of Fakh, the two armies met, and a hard battle ensued. During the battle, Ḥusayn, along with a group from the notables of the Hāshimīs were martyred. A group from the remaining army was scattered while the rest were taken as prisoners; these prisoners were relocated to Baghdad, where they were soon executed.

Hādī's government officials did not suffice with the simple killing of these prisoners of war; they went as far as to not allow the bodies to be given a burial. Moreover, their heads were cut off and sent to Hādī 'Abbāsī in Baghdad. According to some historians, the number of these heads exceeded one hundred.³⁰ The defeat of this movement was an exceedingly bitter and painful event for the Shias and it proved to be particularly painful for the family of the Prophet. It reminded them once again of the painful tragedy of Karbalā. This event was in fact so bitter and painful that many years later, Imam Jawād ('a) would say: "After the tragedy of Karbalā, no tragedy was as great for us as the tragedy of Fakh."³¹

³⁰ Ibn Athīr, *Al-Kāmil Fī Tārīkh*, Beirut, Dār Šādir, vol. 6, p. 93.

- Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, Beirut, Dār al-Qamūs al-Hadith, vol. 10, p. 28.

After the defeat of Ḥusayn Sāhib Fakh's army, and his subsequent martyrdom, Yaḥyā ibn 'Abdullah went to Daylam with a group and initiated some activities in that area. The people were drawn to him and soon, a noticeable force was mobilized. Hārūn used certain tricks to bring him to Baghdad, and when he arrived, he had him killed in a savage manner. The details of his martyrdom are mentioned in the coming section: "The Tricks of Hārūn."

³¹ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1385 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 48, p. 165.

The Seventh Imam and the Martyr of Fakh

This rebellion was not without connection to the Seventh Imam ('a)— the Imam ('a) was aware of this rebellion from its very inception and remained informed in regards to it throughout its various stages. He was also in contact with Ḥusayn Shahīd Fakh. Although the Imam ('a) predicted the defeat of the rebellion, he saw Shahīd Fakh's firm resolution and intent, and so he said to him: "Although you will be martyred, still be diligent in this battle and Jihād. This group (consists) of a wicked and wrong-doing people, who have the outer appearances of faith, but they have no faith or conviction inside their hearts. I ask for your reward and compensation in this path from God, the Most High."³²

From another angle, Hādī 'Abbāsī knew that the Seventh Imam ('a) was one of the greatest personalities from among the family of the Prophet. He also knew that the Hāshimīs and Sādāt followed in his example and acted under his leadership and guidance. After the tragedy of Fakh, he became very angry because he believed that behind the scenes, the Seventh Imam ('a) had been the true leader of the rebellion and that he had coordinated its actions. As a result of this, he threatened the Seventh Imam ('a) with death, saying: "I swear by God that Ḥusayn (Sāhib Fakh) revolted against me on the orders of Mūsā ibn Ja'far. The leader of this family is none other than Mūsā ibn Ja'far. May God kill me if I leave him alive."³³

While this threat was met with coolness and indifference on the part of the Imam ('a), it created great fear within the Shia community and all those who supported the family of

³² Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1385 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 48, p. 169.

- Kulaynī, *al-Ūsul Min al-Kāfi*, Tehran, Maktabah Ṣadūq, 1381 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 366.

- Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfihānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibūn*, Najaf, Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Ḥaydaria, 1385 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 298.

³³ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1385 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 48, p. 151.

the Prophet. Yet, before Hādī could act upon his threat, his life came to an end. The news of his death was met with waves of happiness and joy in the city of Medina.

3- Hārūn al-Rashīd

The rulers of the Umayyid and 'Abbāsīd dynasties governed over the Muslims for many long centuries. Throughout this time period, they always desired to strengthen their spiritual influence over their subjects in order to bolster their rule and solidify their control. They also sought out the people's trust and respect since their authority, to a very large extent, depended upon it. The greater gains they made in this domain essentially meant that the people would be more obedient towards them. The people would even consider it their religious and God ordained duty to obey and bow down before their authority. Naturally, this level of heartfelt obedience and reverence cannot be inspired by force. The only methods which were found to work by the rulers were ones which involved wholesale deception and deceit.

Moreover, the 'Abbāsīds had a winning card in this matter which the Umayyids did not. This was the kinship and nearness which the 'Abbāsīds could claim to the family of the Prophet. The 'Abbāsīds were from the descendants of the uncle of the Prophet of Islam, 'Abbās ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. Due to this kinship, they made many propagandistic gains, and they introduced themselves as the inheritors of the caliphate.³⁴

Still, when faced with the spiritual authority and lineage of the Shia Imams, these claims were found to be quite shallow. Firstly, in the matter of the caliphate, the issue of inheritance was not something with religious sanction; what

³⁴ While the Umayyids did not possess such lineage and could not make such claims, they still attempted to gain the love of the people through various other means. Mū'awīya engaged in much fabrication of traditions through hiring liars who were willing to fabricate anything for the right amount of money.

was important was the worthiness and purity of the caliph and leader himself.

Secondly, even if it were supposed that inheritance could be an issue of consideration, the descendants of Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a) would have prevalence over others due to being nearer in kinship to the Prophet (ṣ). The Shia Imams ('a) possessed both the personal worthiness of rule, as well as the familial relationship and nearness to the Prophet (ṣ). These individuals were perpetually respected and honored by the people, and all of the efforts of the Umayyid and 'Abbāsīd rulers to sway the scales to their benefit could only come up short.

Governance over the Hearts

During the time of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs, this issue manifested itself the most during the rule of Hārūn. Even with all of his power and the expansion of territories which had taken place, Hārūn still sensed that the hearts of the people were with Imam Mūsā ibn Ja'far ('a). He was tormented deeply by this matter, and through various methods, he attempted to neutralize the influence of the Imam ('a).

For Hārūn, it was intolerable that each day he would receive reports that the people had secretly given their Islamic taxes to Mūsā ibn Ja'far ('a). This action of the people was in reality their declaration that they considered Hārūn's rule to be illegitimate, and showed their enmity towards his caliphate. This is why, when Hārūn saw the Imam ('a) next to the Kaaba one day, he asked him: "Is it you that the people have secretly pledged their allegiance to and selected as their leader?" The Imam ('a) replied: "I govern over the hearts of the people, while you rule over their bodies."³⁵

³⁵ Ibn Hajar Haytamī, al-Šawā'iq al-Muḥriqah, Cairo, Maktabah Cairo, p. 204.

Who Is the Descendent of the Prophet?

Hārūn would use every opportunity to openly introduce himself as the heir of the Prophet, and he would lean on this relationship as a source of legitimacy and honor. One day, Hārūn entered the city of Medina, and went to visit the holy grave of the Prophet (ﷺ). When he reached the sanctuary, there was a large gathering of people from the Quraysh, and other tribes, assembled there. Hārūn turned, faced the resting place of the Prophet (ﷺ), and said: "Greetings upon you, oh Prophet of God. Greetings upon you, oh son of my uncle." Here, Hārūn was attempting to show his proximity to the Prophet (ﷺ) in front of the masses, in order to bolster the legitimacy of his rule and tie it to his genealogical relationship with the Messenger (ﷺ).

The Imam ('a) was also present in that gathering, and he understood the intent behind Hārūn's words. He went close to the resting place of the Prophet (ﷺ) and said with a loud voice: "Greetings upon you, oh Prophet of God (ﷺ), Greetings upon you, oh father." Hārūn became so upset at this that his face changed color and he murmured involuntarily: "This is truly an honor."³⁶

Hārūn not only worked hard to show his familial relationship with the Prophet (ﷺ), but he also wished to downplay the family relationship of the Imams to the Prophet (ﷺ) as well. One day, he said to the Seventh Imam ('a): "How do you claim that you are the descendent of the Prophet, while in reality you are the children of 'Alī ('a), and every individual is linked through their male ancestors and not their female ancestors?" Imam Kāẓim ('a) answered him by reciting the following Quranic verse: "...and among his (Ibrāhīm's) progeny, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron: thus do we reward those who do good... And Zakariya and John, and Jesus and Elias: all in the ranks of the

³⁶ Shaykh Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, Qum, Maktabah Baṣīratī, p. 298.

- Ibn Athīr, *Al-Kāmil Fī Tārīkh*, Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, vol. 6, p. 164.

righteous.”³⁷

He then said: “In this verse, Jesus is counted as being from the children of the great prophets (‘a) of the past, while he did not have a father and is linked with the prophets (‘a) only through his mother. Therefore, according to the ruling of this verse, the children of a mother are counted as descendants. We are considered as children of the Prophet (s) through the medium of our mother (Fāṭimah (‘a)).”³⁸ In the face of this irrefutable logic, Hārūn could not say anything and he remained silent before the Imam (‘a).

In a similar discussion between the Imam (‘a) and Hārūn, the Imam (‘a) was asked why they were considered the children of the Prophet and not the children of ‘Alī (‘a). The Imam gave the following answer: “If the Prophet (s) was brought to life and he wished to marry your daughter, would you wed your daughter to the Prophet (s)?” Hārūn replied: “Not only would I wed my daughter, but through this union, I would feel honored over all the Arabs and non-Arabs.” The Imam (‘a) answered: “But this matter would not apply to me; neither would the Prophet (s) seek to marry my daughter, nor would I wed my daughter to him.” Hārūn asked: “Why?” The Imam (‘a) answered: “Because I have descended from his lineage and this marriage would be unlawful (religiously forbidden), but you are not from his lineage.” Hārūn replied: “I see... this is certainly correct.”³⁹

Who is the Owner of This Palace?

One day, the Seventh Imam (‘a) entered one of Hārūn’s extremely opulent and luxurious palaces in Baghdad. Hārūn,

³⁷ Surah An‘ām, Verses 85 and 86.

³⁸ Shablanjī, *Nūr al-Abṣār*, Cairo, Maktabah Mashhad al-Ḥusaynī, p. 149.

- Ibn Ṣabbāgh Mālikī, *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimah*, Najaf, Maktabah Dār al-Kutub al-Tijāriya, p. 220.

The Imam (a) also used the verse of Mubahila in this exchange, where Imam Ḥasan (a) and Imam Ḥusayn (a) are considered (ابناءنا), and counted as the children of the Prophet (s).

³⁹ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1385 Hijrī Qamari, vol. 48, p. 127.

who was intoxicated with power and might, pointed towards his palace and asked in an arrogant tone: "Who is the owner of this palace?" Hārūn, through these words, wanted to show the Imam ('a) the magnificence of his power and position. The Imam ('a), without paying the least bit of attention to the palace and its adornments, replied with the utmost frankness: "This house is the house of the corrupted ones; the same ones whom God has spoken about, saying: 'Those who behave arrogantly on the earth in defiance of right - them will I turn away from my signs: Even if they see all the signs, they will not believe in them; and if they see the way of right conduct, they will not adopt it as the way; but if they see the way of error, that is the way they will adopt. For they have rejected our signs, and failed to take warning from them.'"⁴⁰

Hārūn became very angry at these words, and while trying his best to control his rage, he said: "Then who is the owner of this house?" The Imam ('a) replied without hesitation: "(If you wish to know the truth), this house belongs to the Shias and our followers, but others have usurped it through force." Hārūn replied: "If this palace belongs to the Shias, then why do the owners not take it back?" The Imam ('a) replied: "The home was taken from its true owner at a time when it was flourishing and whenever he (the owner) can return it back to its flourishing state, he will take it back."⁴¹

Hārūn: A Man of Many Personalities

Most individuals, in terms of their manner of thinking and personality, have certain distinguishing features and qualities which are unique to them. Some individuals, on the other hand, due to various inadequacies in their upbringing, or some other factors, are beset with disharmonious personalities and thought processes. These individuals are

⁴⁰ Surah 'Arāf, Verse 146.

⁴¹ Majlisī, Biḥār al-Anwār, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmīyah, 1385 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 48, p. 137.

- 'Ayāshī, Tafsīr 'Ayāshī, Qum, al-Maṭba'at al-'Ilmiyah, vol. 2, p. 30.

not characterized by one personality; they instead have two or sometimes even more sets of separate personalities, which can at times conflict with one other. These individuals act in ways which are oftentimes contradictory and as a result, people are oftentimes confused and frightened by their behavior. While accepting such examples of contradictory behavior may be difficult at first, through some research, it becomes clear that not only are such things possible, but there have in fact been many individuals throughout history who have been afflicted with such disorders.

In a well-known psychology text, we find the following excerpt: "Human beings can easily find themselves in the grip of false emotions, and baseless whims and desires. For example, they may find themselves in a state of extreme emotion at times, while at other times, they become completely emotionless. Or they may find themselves in a state of pure truthfulness, yet they will then switch to a state of lying about everything. They may find themselves in a state of unpretentiousness and then quickly switch to deceiving even their own family members. These are contradictory states which can potentially be found in human beings, and they are composed of conscious and subconscious parts of the individual."⁴²

Such individuals undergo deceptive and contradictory emotions, and for this reason, they behave in an unbalanced manner. Sometimes they are affected by a love of wealth and luxury, and at other times, they incline towards asceticism and Sufi-like behavior. Sometimes, they are affected by religious preachings, and at other times, they run wild after pleasure and worldly desires. If they pass by a mosque, they stand next to the pious ones in prayer, and if they pass by a place of wine drinking, they stop and drink their fill. From one angle, they can become exceedingly wrathful, beyond normal boundaries, and from another angle, they can become

⁴² Doctor Sâhib al-Zamânî, Nâsir al-Dîn, Ânsûye Chehrehâ, Tehran, Mu'assassah Maṭbū'atî 'Aṭâ'î, 1343 Hijrî Shamshî, p. 31.

very merciful and forgiving. History has many examples of such individuals with multiple personalities— one such example in Islamic history is Hārūn al-Rashīd.

Hārūn was born in the 'Abbāsīd palaces, and from an early age, he was raised with luxury and pleasure seeking as a normal way of life. Unsurprisingly, he became inclined towards such things. Yet, at the same time, the nation in which he lived was an Islamic nation and there was pressure on him to live according to Islamic standards and ideals. From this perspective, he formed many differing and contradictory tendencies within himself; he was composed of both good and bad, as well as the ugly and beautiful.

In his inner self and personality, Hārūn was composed of various strange and contradictory qualities. For example, he could be both an oppressor, as well as a man of justice. He could be extremely merciful, as well as extremely vengeful. At times, he was a believer in Islam, yet also a disbeliever. During some instances, he was cooperative, while also being very harsh.

On the one hand, he was an oppressor who killed many innocent people without hesitation, particularly from the family of the Prophet. Yet, on the other hand, whenever he heard religious teachings and sermons, and he remembered the Day of Judgment, he would cry heavily. He would both pray and drink wine. When he heard the admonition of scholars, he would show himself as the most pious and faithful of individuals. Yet when he sat on the seat of the caliphate, and engaged in managing the affairs of the nation, he was one of the most oppressive of rulers.

Historians have written: "One day, Hārūn went to visit Fuḍayl ibn 'Ayād, who was one of the upright and progressive individuals of that time. Fuḍayl began to criticize Hārūn's illegitimate actions in severe terms, and warned him of the divine punishment which was awaiting the oppressors in the hereafter. When Hārūn heard these words, he began to weep, and he wept so much that he lost consciousness. When he

came to, he asked Fuḍayl to repeat his admonishment. Fuḍayl repeated what he had said and Hārūn began to weep heavily for a second time until he passed out and became unconscious from the severity of his weeping. This same event was repeated several times in succession. Afterwards, Hārūn gave 1,000 dinars to Fuḍayl, so that he could spend them on various causes.”

Through these actions, Hārūn is a perfect example of a dual personality which was at complete odds with itself. Perhaps, according to Hārūn, it was sufficient to cry out in fear of God and then pass out, after which he would feel free to engage in whatever he wished without concern for the consequences. It has also been mentioned that Hārūn possessed 1,000 female slaves, 300 of whom were exclusively trained in singing, dancing, and playing music.⁴³ It is narrated that he once went into a state of extreme excitement in a gathering, and ordered that 3 million dirhams be spent on 1,000 similar gatherings. Another time, he was again absorbed into a deeply excited state, and he ordered that the singer who was responsible for this be made the governor of Egypt.⁴⁴

At one point, Hārūn bought one female slave for 100,000 dinars, and he bought another for 36,000 dinars; yet he kept this second slave for only one night, and the next day, he gave her to one of his officials. Only God knows what his reasons were for such bizarre actions.⁴⁵ It goes without saying that Hārūn would use the wealth of the public treasury, which was the rightful property of the people, to fund these whims. This wealth had been taken from the hard work and labor of the masses, and it belonged to them. In spite of this, Hārūn would freely spend it as he wished, as if he had earned it from

⁴³ Jurjī Zaydān, *The History of the Islamic Civilization*, translated by: ‘Alī Jawāhir Kalām, Tehran, Mu’assasah Maṭbū‘ātī Amīr Kabīr, 1336 Hijrī Shamshī, vol. 5, p. 162.

⁴⁴ Jurjī Zaydān, *Ibid*, p. 173.

⁴⁵ Jurjī Zaydān, *Ibid*, p. 163.

his own labor and hard work.⁴⁶ In spite of this waste and extravagance, Hārūn would cry these crocodile tears and consider himself to be a pure and pious individual.

The True Face of Hārūn

Aḥmad Amīn, the contemporary Egyptian historian, mentions three reasons for Hārūn's inclinations towards pleasure seeking. These are namely the higher standards of living that society had attained at that moment in time, the influence of the Iranians, who had a historical precedent for inclinations toward such behavior in his court, and finally: "The third reason relates to the type of upbringing and the subsequent nature of Hārūn himself. In my opinion, during the period of his youth, he possessed many sharp emotions, but he did not completely submit to them, for he possessed a rather strong will. In regards to his temperament and upbringing, a military type of spirit was formed in him. Due to his strong emotions, the power of his will, and the effects of his youth, many divergent conditions were formed in him. For example, when he heard a sermon, he was deeply affected and would weep loudly. At the same time, if he heard music, he was so deeply affected that he would leave his normal state of being and go into a trance like state." When Ibrāhīm Muṣalī would sing, and Barṣūmā would play his musical instruments, and Zalzal would play his tambourine, Hārūn's very state was transformed and he would say in an audacious manner: "Oh Adam, if today you could see who participates in my parties, you would become happy."⁴⁷

While religious feelings were present in Hārūn, a love of music, singing, and self-indulgence were also present. As a result, he would both pray and also listen to a great deal of music, poetry, and singing. His feelings would go in many

⁴⁶ Doctor Alvardi, 'Alī, *The Role of Preaching in Islam*, translated by: Muḥammad 'Alī Khalīlī, Tehran, New Month Magazine Publications, p. 39.

⁴⁷ Aḥmad Amīn has narrated this section from Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfihānī in his book *Al-Aghānī* (vol. 5, p. 241).

directions, and he would act out in excess, in whichever direction he was led by his fickle emotions. On one occasion, when he became pleased with the Barāmakah family, he became unusually attached to them and drew them close to himself. However, when he became angry with them, or when certain jealous individuals aroused his ire against them, he went ahead and completely wiped them out.

Hārūn so thoroughly enjoyed Ibrāhīm Muṣālī's singing that he raised him in rank and position so that he was similar to the judges and scholars in social status. Yet he never questioned on what authority and with whose permission he would pour the money of the Muslims into the pockets of these individuals. The writer of the book *Al-Aghānī* has written a very interesting line on this matter, in which he encapsulates these contradictory and unusual states that were present in Hārūn: "When he was subject to a sermon, Hārūn would cry more than anyone else, and when he became angry, he was more oppressive than anyone else."

From this perspective, it is not surprising that Hārūn would, at times, seem extremely religious and he would thus spend time praying, yet at the same time, there were many days when he would kill and spill blood without hesitation. Then, on another day, he would listen to music and become so excited, that he would lose control over his senses and faculties. These characteristics are very difficult to fathom and understand when found in a single individual. In truth, they may seem like the characteristics of multiple individuals.⁴⁸

This is a true sketch of Hārūn al-Rashīd as an individual, with all of his various characteristics. Unfortunately, some historians have not presented his characteristics in a comprehensive way and they have instead showed only half of his reality (namely, the good half). This is not sufficient in

⁴⁸ Amīn, Aḥmad, *Ḍuḥ al-Islām*, Seventh Edition, Cairo, Maktabah al-Nihḍat al-Miṣriyah, vol. 1, p. 112-113. With slight summarization.

understanding him as a person; indeed, both halves are necessary to see the whole of him as an individual.

Hārūn's Trickery and Religious Pretensions

As mentioned before, although the Umayyid and 'Abbāsīd rulers were similar to each other in how they deviated the Islamic government from its primary course, as well as in their position against the family of the Prophet, there was still a difference between the two in terms of their relationship with the religious scholars of their respective eras. The Umayyids, with the exception of Mū'āwīya and one or two other individuals, did not have much of a relationship with the religious scholars, nor did they interfere much in their work. They were mostly busy with managing the political situation of their time and this mostly involved crushing rebellions and social movements, as well as winning wars in foreign lands. Moreover, they were also busy with managing the economic situation of their country and therefore, they left the religious scholars mostly alone and did not interfere with religious matters too deeply.

But when the Umayyid dynasty fell, and the 'Abbāsīds came to power, the situation was completely reversed. The 'Abbāsīds adopted a religious facade and they worked towards benefitting from the religious atmosphere that was prevalent during their time. Contact between the government and the religious scholars, particularly during the time of the first 'Abbāsīd caliph, became commonplace. This shift was caused by the 'Abbāsīds reluctance to be recognized only as political rulers, for they also wished to take on the mantle of religious authority as well.⁴⁹

There are many examples of the 'Abbāsīds feigning religiosity and thereby gaining the people's respect and admiration. Jurgi Zaydan has written: "The 'Abbāsīd caliphs, the Fatimid caliphs of Egypt, and the Umayyid caliphs of

⁴⁹ Amīn, *Ibid*, vol. 2, p. 162-163.

Andalusia were made impervious to many issues and problems due to their superficial religious appearance and pretensions. For this very reason, some of the non-Arab governments, such as the Ottoman Empire, ended up lasting longer than other governments due to the manifestation of this religious (guise)..."

In order to garner the love of the masses, these governments always proclaimed that they ruled under the shadow of God, and that their government was something that was legitimized by God himself. Jurji Zaydan, in regards to the deceptive propaganda and influence of the caliphs amongst the masses, has further added: "...the people would say: 'The 'Abbāsīd caliphate will continue until the coming of the Christ, and if the caliphate is overthrown, then the sun will set, it will no longer rain, and the plants will all dry up.'"

The 'Abbāsīds approved of these exaggerations and stories. Even Hārūn, who was an intelligent man and who lived in a time when Islamic culture had progressed to a very advanced level, approved of these types of stories... It is evident that if such a state was promoted by the caliphs at a time of the advancement of Islam and its greatness, these superstitions would have completely overtaken the minds of the people during eras of more transparent corruption.

It was in this manner that Mutawakil, the 'Abbāsīd caliph, was named the "Shadow of God." Furthermore, it was said: "This is the shadow of God's mercy which has been spread for protection from the burning of the fire." Court poets would also recite similar things in their poetry. For example, Ibn Hani praised al-Mu'īz Fātimī by saying: "Whatever you will, comes into existence, and not what is destiny. Then command and be the commander, for you are Wāhid al-Qaḥḥār."⁵⁰

Hārūn, in turn, had a strange insistence that all of his actions be given religious sanction. He would give religious

⁵⁰ Jurji Zaydān, *The History of the Islamic Civilization*, translated by: 'Alī Jawāhir Kalām, Tehran, Mu'assasah Maṭbū'ātī Amīr Kabīr, 1336 Hijrī Shamshī, vol. 4, p. 242.

justifications for all of his crimes, and attempt to show that all of them were in accordance with religious law. During one of the years of his rule, Hārūn ended up going on the Ḥajj pilgrimage. At the conclusion of the Ḥajj rites, he began to supplicate at length for his Christian physician (Jibrīl ibn Bakhtīshū'). This was while it was forbidden in Islamic law to do so.

When the Hāshimīs saw this, they became very angry with Hārūn. In the face of their protest, Hārūn said: "It is true that this man is not a Muslim, and that supplicating for him is not proper— this is all correct. At the same time, my health and physical well-being are in his hands, and the interest of the Muslims is in my well-being. Therefore, the well-being and welfare of the Muslims is on his shoulders and so there is no problem in supplicating for him."¹

Hārūn's logic in this case was indeed very telling. According to his logic, the welfare of the Muslim nation was contingent upon his very existence. With this line of reasoning, Hārūn showed himself as not just a dispensable political ruler, but as an individual whose very existence was necessary for the survival of the Muslim nation. It might be thought that justifying the actions of an individual such as Hārūn would be a very difficult task. Nonetheless, Hārūn managed to do this, and he did so through the employment of a group of well-paid judges and jurisprudents. These hired agents were instrumental in using religious language to explain the actions of the caliph to the people in a way which exonerated him completely.

The Council of Judges

One of the very clear and manifest examples of Hārūn's deceit is found in the martyrdom of Yaḥyā ibn 'Abdullah. Yaḥyā ibn 'Abdullah was the grandson of Imam Ḥasan ('a) and one of the notables of the Hāshimī family. He was a

¹ Doctor Alvardi, 'Ali, *The Role of Preaching in Islam*, translated by: Muḥammad 'Ali Khalili, Tehran, New Month Magazine Publications, p. 55.

prominent individual and one of the select companions of Imam Ṣādiq (‘a).⁵²

Yaḥyā participated in the revolt of Ḥusayn Shahīd Fakh, against the ‘Abbāsīd government. In fact, he was one of the commanders of Ḥusayn Shahīd Fakh’s army. After the defeat of the rebel army and the martyrdom of Ḥusayn, Yaḥyā went to Daylam with a group of people and began engaging in various activities there. The people of that area began to follow him, and a sizable force was soon established.

Hārūn sent Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā Barmakī, along with a division of his army to Daylam. After entering Daylam, Faḍl, under the orders of Hārūn, opened up a line of correspondence with Yaḥyā. He began promising various things to Yaḥyā and gave him a pledge of safety and security. Yaḥyā saw his forces beginning to disperse at the prospect of these promises. Without having much of an alternative, he, too, accepted the offer of security from Hārūn. After securing a handwritten letter of security from Hārūn himself, and having a large group of the notables witness it, Yaḥyā entered Baghdad.

Outwardly, Hārūn treated Yaḥyā with kindness and gifted him with a large amount of wealth. Secretly though, Hārūn wished to kill Yaḥyā as punishment for his activities; he accused Yaḥyā of planning a secret revolt and attempting to rise up against him. Still, due to the explicit and very public guarantee which he had given him, Hārūn was not able to simply put him to death. Therefore, he decided to nullify the letter of security through a religious ruling, which in turn

⁵² Abū al-Faraj al-Isfihānī, *Maqātil al-Tālibiyyīn*, Najaf, Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Haydariya, 1385 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 308. The late Kulaynī, in his book *Kāfi* (vol. 1, p. 366), narrates a letter from Yaḥyā ibn ‘Abdullah addressed to Imam Mūsā ibn Ja‘far (a), in which Yaḥyā criticizes his method and his father’s method (Imam Ṣādiq (a)), and where Imam Kāzim (a) answers back with a fierce response. The late ‘Allāmah Māmaḡānī, in his book (*Tanqīḥ al-Maqāl*, Tehran, Jahān Publications, vol. 3) has said about this letter that: “Its chain of narration is not subject to question, but its content is in conflict with the information we have about Yaḥyā. Here, it is possible that the narrators made a mistake in what they recorded.” The compiler of the book *The Life of Imam Mūsā ibn Ja‘far* (a) has proven that this tradition is unreliable, for firstly, it is a mursal tradition, and secondly, its chain of narration contains individuals who are unknown and who cannot be found in the books of Rijāl. (*Ḥayāt al-Imām Mūsā ibn Ja‘far*, Second Edition, Najaf, Maṭba‘at al-Ādāb, 1390 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 2, p. 99).

would give him the necessary authority to kill him. In order to achieve this, he ordered a group of judges to assemble, in order to review the letter and issue the proper ruling. In this council, Muḥamad ibn Ḥasan Shaybānī, Ḥasan ibn Zīyād Lu'lu'ī, and Abū al-Bakhtarī⁵³ were all present.⁵⁴

When the council gathered, Muḥamad ibn Ḥasan, who was a relatively impartial individual (unlike his teacher Abū Yūsuf, who had sold his services to Hārūn)⁵⁵ read the letter of security and said: "The letter of security is sound and credible, and there is no way to nullify it."⁵⁶ Abū al-Bakhtarī then took the letter, looked at it, and said: "This letter of security is void and without value. Yaḥyā revolted against the caliph and spilled the blood of a group of individuals. Kill him; the responsibility of killing him is on me." Hārūn became overjoyed at this ruling and said: "If the letter of security is null, then you yourself should tear it into pieces." Abū al-Bakhtarī spit on the letter and tore it. Hārūn then gave one million and six hundred thousand dirhams to Abū al-Bakhtarī, as well as a number of cattle. He also selected him for the position of the judgeship.⁵⁷ On the other hand, Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan, due to his ruling, was prohibited from making any further rulings,⁵⁸ and after some time,

⁵³ Wahab ibn Wahab Abū al-Bakhtarī Qarshī was originally from Medina, but he lived in Baghdad. During the time of the caliphate of Maḥdī 'Abbāsī, he was assigned the arbitral judgeship of the military, and afterwards, he was assigned to the judgeship of Medina. Abū al-Bakhtarī was a corrupt and deviant individual, who was known as someone who would openly lie. According to the scholars of tradition, Abū al-Bakhtarī's traditions are without value and credibility. (Shamsh al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad, *Mizān al-ʿitdāl Fi Naqd al-Rijāl*, First Edition, Cairo, Maṭba'at Sa'ādah, 1325 Hijri Qamarī, vol. 3, p. 278).

⁵⁴ Yaḥyā ibn 'Abdullāh had previously shown his letter of security to Mālik ibn Anas and various other jurists, and they had all corroborated the letter's soundness and credence.

⁵⁵ Amin, Aḥmad, *Daḥyā al-Islām*, Seventh Edition, Cairo, Maktabah Nihḍat al-Miṣriyah, vol. 2, p. 203.

⁵⁶ Amin, *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 204.

⁵⁷ Sharīf al-Qarshī, *Bāqir*, *Ḥayāt al-Imam Mūsā ibn Ja'far* (a), Second Edition, 1389 Hijri Qamarī, vol. 2, p. 100. Also refer to: Doctor Alvardi, 'Alī, *The Role of Preaching in Islam*, translated by: Muḥammad 'Alī Khalili, Tehran, New Month Magazine Publications, p. 52.

⁵⁸ In addition to this, he was removed from his position of judgeship. (Amin, *Ibid.*, vol.

Yahyā was killed by the caliph.⁵⁹

Religious Rulings Based on Expediency

Abū Yūsuf was nominated by Hārūn as the "Judge of Judges," one of the highest positions in the nation.⁶⁰ He, in turn, protected Hārūn's caliphate through the use of his power of argumentation and sophistry. He had an extraordinary skill in justifying various issues, and he would use these skills to conceal Hārūn's illegitimate actions and behavior, rationalizing them through religious terminology and logic. Let us take a look at just two incidents which took place during his life:

1-During the beginning of Hārūn's caliphate, Hārūn fell in love with a female slave who had been owned by his father, Maḥdī. When he expressed his affection to the slave, she said to him: "Don't even think about such a thing, for your father and I shared the same bed." In spite of this, Hārūn was captivated by her and could not hold himself back. He summoned Abū Yūsuf, explained the situation, and asked him for a way out.

Abū Yūsuf coolly said to Hārūn: "Must every claim that a slave makes be accepted? Do not listen to her, for she is not a

1, p. 204).

⁵⁹ The method of how Yahyā was killed is a matter of dispute (Sharīf Qarshī, *Ibid*, vol. 2, p. 100).

Ya'qūbī has written: "Yahyā died of starvation in prison. An individual who was imprisoned with him has mentioned: 'We were both imprisoned in the same area, and our cells were next to each other. Sometimes Yahyā would speak to me from behind a short wall, which was between us. One day he said to me: Today it has been nine days that they have not given me any food or water. On the tenth day, the guard who was assigned to Yahyā's cell, entered and began to search it. After searching the cell, he then removed Yahyā's clothing and began to search his body. From underneath the clothing, the guard found a reed which was filled with oil (perhaps Yahyā, in times of severe hunger, would suck on the reed and drink the oil, in order to remain alive). The guard then confiscated the reed. Following this event, Yahyā lost the last of his energy, collapsed on the ground, and soon thereafter, passed away.'" (Tārīkh Ya'qūbī, Najaf, Manshūrāt Maktabah al-Ḥaydarīa, 1384 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 3, p. 145).

⁶⁰ It is said: During that time, a 'Judge of Judges' was an individual who was selected to run in the highest possible position of the judgeship in the country. It is clear that Hārūn would not give such a high position to just anyone.

truthful slave.”⁶¹ This is while Islam has clearly shown that in a case like this, her words would have had to be accepted at face value.

Deceiving the Conscience

2- One day, Hārūn asked his personal cook to prepare a meal for him, which included the meat of a young camel. After the food was served, Ja‘far Barmakī said: “Each bite which the caliph takes from this meal comes out to 400,000 dirhams.” When Hārūn heard this, he expressed surprise, so Ja‘far Barmakī explained what he meant. He said that some time before, the caliph had asked for a similar food, and at that moment, it had not been possible to prepare it for him. From then on, a young camel was slaughtered for the palace kitchen every single day, and the collective price of these camels had amounted to 400,000 dirhams.

Hārūn, who was normally used to spending the money of the Muslims on his various whims, now began to express regret and sorrow for what had taken place. He commanded that in order to make up for this act, several million dirhams should be given to the poor as charity. This act, while seemingly benevolent, does not take into consideration that this money belonged to the public anyway, as it was from the public treasury. This money was not the caliph’s personal wealth where he could spend it as he pleased. It should have been divided among the people in a well-planned and just manner, and it definitely could not be considered as a form of personal charity from the caliph’s own pockets.

In any case, news of this reached Abū Yūsuf. In order to justify the caliph’s actions, and to also show his own usefulness to Hārūn’s rule, he devised an interesting way to justify the actions of the caliph. He went to Hārūn and asked him the reason behind his distress. Hārūn explained what had happened. Abū Yūsuf looked at Ja‘far and asked: “Was

⁶¹ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Suyūfī, *Tārīkh al-Khūlafā*, Baghdad, Maktabah al-Muthannā, p. 291.

the meat from these camels wasted or did the people end up using them?" Ja'far, who had perhaps understood Abū Yūsuf's intent in asking this question, replied: "The people would end up using the meat."

When Abū Yūsuf heard this, he said happily: "Glad tidings be upon the caliph who has gained a great reward, for all of the meat which was prepared was put at the disposal of the Muslims. God has made this charity as a means of great reward for the caliph."⁶² It is ironic that a few pieces of spoiled meat which were about to be given to the dogs of Baghdad, and were instead given to some half-starved people, was considered by Abū Yūsuf to be a charity and a means of reward from God. This was clearly a misuse of the public treasury, and not a means of blessing and reward for Hārūn.

By understanding the prevailing situation of the time, it becomes easier to understand the level of difficulty which Imam Kāzīm ('a) faced. Imam Kāzīm ('a) was faced with a deceptive and cunning caliph who hid his true nature behind a garb of religiosity. Hārūn was indeed very careful to show himself as a just and faithful Muslim ruler in the eyes of the masses.

'Alī ibn Yaqtīn: The Imam's Agent in Hārūn's Government

'Alī ibn Yaqtīn was one of the prominent and distinguished students of the Seventh Imam ('a). 'Alī was a pure and honorable individual, and enjoyed a special position before the Imam ('a). He was also highly respected and honored in the Shia community.⁶³ 'Alī was born in the city of Kūfah in the year 124 Hijrī, during the last years of the Umayyid government. His father Yaqtīn was one of the leading supporters of the 'Abbāsids, and for this reason, Marwān Ḥimār (the caliph of the time) attempted to arrest

⁶² Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, First Edition, Beirut, Maktabah Ma'ārif, 1966 A.D., vol. 10, p. 216.

⁶³ Shaykh Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, Mashhad, Daneshkadeye Ilahiyāt wa Ma'ārif-e Islāmī, p. 234.

him. He was forced to flee as a result and became a wanted fugitive.

During his time as a fugitive, Yaqṭīn's wife took their two sons, 'Alī and 'Ubayd, to the city of Medina with her. After the fall of the Umayyid government, and the rise of the 'Abbāsids, Yaqṭīn returned to Kūfah and joined Abū al-'Abbās Saffāh. His wife, alongside with their children, returned to Kūfah as well.⁶⁴ 'Alī ibn Yaqṭīn grew up in Kūfah as a result and he ended up joining the circle of the Seventh Imam's ('a) students.

The Intellectual Rank of 'Alī ibn Yaqṭīn

According to the scholars of Rijāl and history, 'Alī was one of the prominent students and companions of the Seventh Imam ('a), and he benefitted greatly from his relationship with the Imam ('a). He also narrated a great number of traditions from the Imam ('a), but he was only able to narrate one tradition from Imam Ṣādiq ('a).⁶⁵

He possessed fame and a sociable personality, while at the same time possessing deep scholarship and learning; he was considered to be one of the foremost intellectuals of his time. He was also an author, who compiled the following books:

- 1- Mā Sa'al 'Anhū al-Ṣādiq ('a) Min al-Malāḥim.⁶⁶
- 2- Manāẓirah al-Shak Biḥadratiḥī.
- 3- Various issues which he learned from Imam Kāẓim ('a).⁶⁷

'Alī ibn Yaqṭīn, through the use of his rank, as well as his social and political position, did many great services for the Shia. As will be mentioned in the coming pages, he was counted as an ever-present sanctuary and refuge for the Shias whenever they faced difficulties.

⁶⁴ Shaykh Ṭūsī, al-Fihrist, Mashhad, Daneshkadeye Ilahiyāt wa Ma'ārif-e Islāmī, p. 234. - Najjāshī, Fihrist Asmā' Muṣanfi al-Shi'ah, Qum, Maktabah al-Dāwari, p. 194.

⁶⁵ Najjāshī, Fihrist Asmā' Muṣanfi al-Shi'ah, Qum, Maktabah al-Dāwari, p. 195.

⁶⁶ This contains the predictions of Imam Ṣādiq (a) about the events of the future as an answer to some questions which were asked from him.

⁶⁷ Shaykh Ṭūsī, al-Fihrist, Mashhad, Daneshkadeye Ilahiyāt wa Ma'ārif-e Islāmī, p. 234.

The Ministry of 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn: A Support for the Shia

During the caliphate of Manṣūr and Hārūn, the continuous revolts of the Alawīs and Hāshimīs were met with a series of defeats. With the martyrdom of the leaders of these revolts, and the scattering of their forces, it became clear that the prevailing conditions of the time were not conducive to an armed uprising, and that the struggle must be continued in a different form.

Owing to these conditions, the Imam ('a) refrained from engaging in any overt anti-government activities, and he concentrated his efforts in awakening the masses and working on individuals who could later develop into leaders. The Imam ('a) also worked to reveal the corrupt nature of the 'Abbāsīd government to the people and spread Shia teachings throughout the society

It was based on this plan of action that the Imam ('a), in spite of a general prohibition of cooperating with oppressive governments, allowed certain individuals to take on certain official government positions. This allowed these individuals to gain access to the inner workings of the government itself, and also to protect and support the Shias whenever they ran into various problems.

When 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn reached his position in Hārūn's government, it was as a part of this same plan of action. 'Alī, in contrast to his father, who was one of the supporters of the 'Abbāsīds and did not believe in the imamate of the Twelve Imams ('a), was a staunch and loyal Shia, and his worldview was that of a true follower of the Ahl al-Bayt.⁶⁸ One of the foundations of his beliefs was that of Intidhār— the belief in the establishment of a just and rightful government, which necessitated the rejection of the legitimacy of the

⁶⁸ Ibn Nadīm, in his index, has introduced Yaqtīn (the father of 'Alī) as a Shia. Some of the famous scholars from the past, as well as from contemporary times, have referenced his words without narrating any sources. But some contemporary researchers have proven that the father of 'Alī was not a Shia. (Tastarī, Muḥammad Taqī, Qāmūs al-Rijāl, Tehran, The Center for Book Publications, vol. 7, p. 90).

oppressive rulers.

This issue becomes clear through a conversation which took place between 'Alī and his father. One day, Yaqtīn asked his son: "How is it that the things which your leaders have foretold about us 'Abbāsids have all come to fulfilment, but the things which they have foretold about you (the Shias and the establishment of the promised government) have not yet been fulfilled?" 'Alī answered: "What has been said about you and us, comes from a single source, but because your government's time is at the present, thus the foretelling has been fulfilled clearly and without any ambiguity. You saw that all of it came to pass truthfully. But since the time of our promised government has not yet come to pass, we have hope and aspire towards it. If our leaders had said that the government of the family of the Prophet will, for example, come after 200 or 300 years, the hearts would be anguished due to the long period of waiting and the people's faith in regards to this event would be lessened. Yet, in order that the people's faith remains steadfast, our leaders have not designated its time and have instead simply said: 'It will come soon.' Through these means, they have made the people hopeful and have introduced the coming of the Imam ('a) as being near."⁶⁹ In light of 'Alī's history, the importance of his coming to power can clearly be appreciated.

The Imam's Conditional Approval

'Alī ibn Yaqtīn accepted the viziership of Hārūn with the approval of Imam Kāẓim ('a).⁷⁰ Afterwards, on multiple occasions, he sought to resign from his position, but Imam Kāẓim ('a) dissuaded him from doing so.⁷¹ The intention of

⁶⁹ Nu'mānī, Ibn Abī Zaynab, Kitāb al-Ghaybah, Tehran, Maktabah al-Ṣadūq, p. 295. 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn had learned this from the Imam (a), for one day he had asked this same question from the Imam (a) and the Imam (a) had given him this same answer. (Nu'mānī, Ibid, p. 296, footnotes, narrated from 'Ilal al-Sharāya').

⁷⁰ Tūsī, Ikhtiyār Ma'rifat al-Rijāl, researched by: Ḥasan Muṣṭafāwī, Mashhad, University of Mashhad, 1348 Hijrī Shamshī, p. 433.

⁷¹ Majlisī, Biḥār al-Anwār, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1385 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 48,

Imam Kāzīm ('a) in encouraging 'Alī through his tenure was the protection of the lives, wealth, and rights of the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), and in the aiding of their movement in secret.

In one instance, Imam Kāzīm ('a) said to 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn: "Guarantee one thing (for me), so that I may guarantee three things for you." 'Alī asked: "What are they?" The Imam ('a) said: "The three things which I will guarantee for you are: 1. That you will never be killed by the sword. 2. That you will never be in poverty, and 3. That you will never be imprisoned. However, what you must guarantee is that whenever one of our followers refers to you, you should fulfil whatever he needs and desires, and you should treat him with respect and honor." 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn accepted this, and the Imam ('a) guaranteed him the three provisions.⁷²

In addition to these words, the Imam ('a) said: "Your position is a means of honor for your brothers (the Shia), and there is hope that God, through you, can remedy the breakages and quench the fire of the sedition of the enemies." 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn was loyal to his pledge, and in all of the time that he held his position, he was an unwavering and solid support for the Shia. He also played a crucial role in protecting the lives and wealth of the Shia.

A Covert Assignment

'Alī ibn Yaqtīn would secretly send his Khūms to the Imam ('a) and in some instances, this would take place under very dangerous circumstances. Two of his companions have narrated the following: "One day, 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn summoned us and gave us some money and letters. He then said to us: 'Buy two animals for transportation and travel through the

p. 157.

⁷² Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmīya, 1385 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 48, p. 136.

- Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār Ma'rifat al-Rijāl*, researched by: Ḥasan Muṣṭafāwī, Mashhad, University of Mashhad, 1348 Hijrī Shamshī, p. 433.

secondary roads away from the main roads. Deliver this money and these letters to Imam Abū al-Ḥasan (‘a) (Imam Kāzīm (‘a)) in a manner that no one will know of it.”

They continue to narrate that: “We arrived in Kūfah, bought animals for transportation, and provisions for the journey. We began the journey and traveled from various secondary roads until we finally arrived in the area of Baṭnu al-Rammah. We tied our mounts, gave them some food, and sat down to eat. At this time, we saw two riders who were coming towards us. As they came closer, we saw that one of them was Imam Kāzīm (‘a).

We stood up, gave our greetings, and turned over the money and letters that we had with us. At this time, the Imam (‘a) took out some letters, gave them to us, and said: ‘These are the answers to your letters.’ We then said: ‘Our food and provisions have been exhausted— if you give us permission, we will go to Medina so that we can both visit the Prophet (ṣ) and also buy some supplies. The Imam (‘a) said: ‘Bring what is left of your supplies.’ We brought out what remained from the supplies and he examined them with his hands. He then said: ‘This will allow you to reach Kūfah.’ The Imam (‘a) did not consider our journey to Medina as being advisable and said: ‘You have (in reality) seen the Prophet (ṣ), therefore return under the protection of God.’”⁷³

Strengthening the Economic Condition of the Shia

Without doubt, any group which shares a common goal and wishes to develop itself is in need of financial backing and support. In cases where this financial support is severed, the very growth of the group is paralyzed and will come to a standstill.

Based on these same general principles, the Shias were also in need of financial backing in order to pursue their goals and ideals. In spite of this very real need, the Shias had

⁷³ Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār Ma‘rifat al-Rijāl*, researched by: Ḥasan Muṣṭafāwī, Mashhad, University of Mashhad, 1348 Hijri Shamshi, p. 436-437.

historically lived under great economic pressure. The governments of the time had a habit of weakening them economically, as a means of weakening the Shias politically.

In addition to the seizure of Fadak from Fātimah Zahrā ('a), which was in reality a political act designed to weaken the economic position of Imam 'Alī ('a) and the Hāshimīs, the history of Islam is replete with many other such examples. One of the tactics which Mū'āwīya used in his attempt to secure the approval of Imam Ḥusayn ('a) for the successorship of his son Yazīd for the caliphate, was to block all financial grants to the Hāshimīs from the public treasury. His goal was to pressure Imam Ḥusayn ('a) to approve the successorship of his corrupt son and give him his pledge of allegiance.⁷⁴

Another example of this economic pressure is found with the second 'Abbāsīd caliph, Abū Ja'far Maṣṣūr. Maṣṣūr enacted a program of poverty and hunger which brought the entire economy to a standstill. He enacted this both on a general scale, and on a more micro scale. His aim in keeping the people hungry and indigent was that they would always be in need of him. Because the people were destitute, they would only be able to think of fulfilling their basic needs in life. They would not have the capacity to think of larger social issues or to even be in a position to pose a danger to the caliph's rule.

One day, Maṣṣūr, in front of his court officials, mentioned the reasons behind his program of poverty and hunger, saying sarcastically: "The Bedouin Arabs speak well when they say: 'Keep your dog hungry, so that he will follow you in the hope of bread.'"⁷⁵ The share of the Shias and Alawīs in this economic hardship was proportionally greater than the rest of the population. This was due to the fact that

⁷⁴ Ibn Athīr, *Al-Kāmil Fī Tārīkh*, Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, vol. 3, p. 551.

- Ibn Qutayba, *Al-Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, Third Edition, Cairo, Maktabah Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1381 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 191.

⁷⁵ This was also mentioned in the section on the life of Imam Ṣādiq (a).

they were always the first to revolt against the oppressive caliphs. The caliphate of Hārūn, with its wholesale waste, extravagance, and complete usurpation of the public treasury, was not an exception to such rebellions and so the Shias were continually deprived of their legitimate rights and purposely weakened from an economic perspective.

‘Alī ibn Yaqtīn, the staunch companion of Imam Kāzīm (‘a), gained the trust of Hārūn in spite of his history of keeping the enemies of the Shia at bay. He became Hārūn’s minister, and used all the means at his disposal to aid the Shia and to help counteract the economic difficulties they faced. He would also send his Khūms, which was a considerable sum of money,⁷⁶ anywhere from 100,000 to 300,000 dirhams, to the Imam (‘a).

The son of ‘Alī ibn Yaqtīn is narrated as having said: “Whenever Imam Kāzīm (‘a) needed anything or needed for something important to be done, he would write a letter to my father saying: ‘buy the following items for me.’ Or he would say: ‘Do the following action but do it through Hishām ibn Ḥakam.’ This condition of gaining Hishām’s consent was only done in important and sensitive matters.”⁷⁷

During the course of Imam Kāzīm’s (‘a) journey to Iraq, ‘Alī ibn Yaqtīn complained of his situation, saying: “Do you see my situation and state (in reference to the government he worked for and the people he had to deal with on a daily basis)?” The Imam (‘a) replied: “God has beloved individuals from within the midst of the oppressors, through whom he supports his good servants, and you are among those beloved men of God.”⁷⁸

On another occasion, ‘Alī asked the Seventh Imam (‘a) about his responsibilities in cooperating with the ‘Abbāsids.

⁷⁶ Tūsī, *Ikhtiyār Ma‘rifat al-Rijāl*, researched by: Ḥasan Muṣṭafāwī, Mashhad, University of Mashhad, 1348 Hijrī Shamshī, p. 434.

⁷⁷ Tūsī, *Ikhtiyār Ma‘rifat al-Rijāl*, researched by: Ḥasan Muṣṭafāwī, Mashhad, University of Mashhad, 1348 Hijrī Shamshī, p. 269.

⁷⁸ Tūsī, *Ikhtiyār Ma‘rifat al-Rijāl*, researched by: Ḥasan Muṣṭafāwī, Mashhad, University of Mashhad, 1348 Hijrī Shamshī, p. 433.

The Imam ('a) said to him: "If you don't have a choice in doing this, then make sure to be careful in regard to the wealth of the Shia." 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn accepted this order of the Imam ('a). He would outwardly collect government taxes from the Shia, but he would secretly return the money back to them.⁷⁹ The government of Hārūn was not a legitimate Islamic government and thus paying taxes to it was not a religious obligation of the Muslims. The true divine government belonged to Imam Mūsā ibn Ja'far ('a), and on his orders, 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn would return the wealth of the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) back to them.

The Ḥajj Pilgrimage

One of the great distinctions of 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn was that he would send a group of people to the Ḥajj pilgrimage every year on his behalf. Moreover, he would give each pilgrim anywhere from 10,000 to 20,000 dirhams.⁸⁰ These individuals numbered anywhere from 150 to 250, sometimes becoming as many as 300.⁸¹

This action, in view of the importance and virtue of the Ḥajj pilgrimage in the religion of Islam, is an important indicator of the piety and devotion of 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn. When we look at the great amount of money which was being spent on this, we also begin to see it as more than just an act of religious devotion. If we consider the number of people that 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn sent on his behalf to the Ḥajj pilgrimage, and the amount of money which was given to each one of them, the numbers are staggering. If say, an average of 200 people were sent each year, and each one was given 10,000 dirhams, this amounts to a total expenditure of two million dirhams every year.

⁷⁹ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1385 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 48, p. 158.

⁸⁰ Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār Ma'rifat al-Rijāl*, researched by: Ḥasan Muṣṭafāwī, Mashhad, University of Mashhad, 1348 Hijrī Shamshī, p. 434.

⁸¹ Ṭūsī, *Ibid*, p. 437 and 434.

From another perspective, the amount that was given each year was only a small fraction of 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn's total expenditure. It was an amount which did not include what he paid in Khūms, Zakāt, and various other charities and religious taxes. When considering all of this, we see that this was just part of an even greater sum of money. A question naturally arises as to how much money 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn possessed, in order that he was able to give away so much?

From among the Shia scholars, the late Shaykh Bahā'ī is seemingly the first person to pay detailed attention to this interesting point. He has addressed this issue with the following words: "I believe that Imam Kāzim (a) gave 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn permission to appropriate money from the public treasury, and that 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn would give from this money to the Shias under the guise of a reward for completing the Ḥajj pilgrimage on his behalf. Through these means, he would not leave any pretext for his enemies to attack him."⁸² Therefore, this act of having people go to the Ḥajj on his behalf was in reality a calculated policy, and 'Alī, under the cover of this act, was strengthening the economic situation of the Shia community.

Further proof of this lies in the fact that many important personalities, such as 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Ḥajjāj and 'Abdullah ibn Yahyā Kāhili⁸³ were among these Ḥajj pilgrims

⁸² Māmaqānī, *Tanqih al-Maqāl*, Tehran, Jahān Publications, vol. 2, p. 317.

⁸³ 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Ḥajjāj was fortunate enough to benefit from the presence of both Imam Šādiq (a) and Imam Kāzim (a). He was from the pious, distinguished, and prominent Shia notables. (*Najjāshī*, *Fihrist Asmā' Muṣanfi al-Shī'ah*, Qum, Maktabah al-Dāwarī, p. 65; Māmaqānī, 'Abdullah, *Tanqih al-Maqāl*, Tehran, Jahān Publications, p. 141).

The sixth Imam (a) said to him: "Oh 'Abd al-Rahmān, engage the people of Medina with intellectual discussions and debate, for I like there to be men like yourself among the Shia." (*Ardibīlī*, *Jāmi'ah al-Rawāt*, *Manshūrāt Maktabah Ayatollah Uzmā Mar'ashī Najafī*, vol. 1, p. 447; Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār Ma'rifat al-Rijāl*, researched by: Ḥasan Muṣṭafāwī, Mashhad, University of Mashhad, 1348 Hijrī Shamshī, p. 402).

'Abdullah ibn Yahyā Kāhili benefited from a special position in relation to Imam Kāzim (a). His rank was such, that on multiple occasions, Imam Kāzim (a) advised 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn in regards to him. On one occasion, he said to 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn: "Secure the welfare and comfort of Kāhili and his family so that I can guarantee paradise for you." (Ṭūsī, *Ibid*, p. 402).

Until the end of his life, 'Alī followed these words of the Imam (a), and secured the

and these were individuals who were from the select companions of the Imam ('a). Due to their special status, they were excluded from the government system and deprived of their salaries.⁸⁴ Another important aspect of this policy involved actually sending the Shias to the great gathering of the Ḥajj pilgrimage. Through these means, the Shia, and in particular the Shia scholars, were introduced to the broader Muslim society. There, they engaged in debates and discussions with various other Muslim sects and brought about a great Shia cultural revolution.

Keep This Piece of Clothing!

'Alī ibn Yaqtīn was continuously engaged in serving Imam Kāzīm ('a) and, as a result, he was placed in dangerous situations from time to time. The Imam ('a) would in turn advise him and this advice was such that it saved his life on several occasions. One year, Hārūn sent a number of robes as an official gift to 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn. Among these articles of clothing was a black fur coat covered with gold brocade, which was a special type of clothing worn only by the caliphs. 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn took the majority of these expensive clothes, and along with the gold brocaded robe, gifted them to Imam Kāzīm ('a). He also turned over some money to the Imam ('a) which he had set aside as Khūms.

The Imam ('a) accepted all of the clothing and money which had been sent, with one exception; he had that specific robe sent back. In a letter to 'Alī, he said: "Keep this piece of clothing and do not part with it, for an event will befall you and it will be of use to you." 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn did not understand why the Imam ('a) had refused the robe, but he followed his advice and kept it. Incidentally, one day he fired one of his close employees for negligence in his duties. That

welfare and comfort of him, his family, and relatives. They were always under his protection and support (Ṭūsī, *Ibid*, 448).

⁸⁴ Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār Ma'rifat al-Rijāl*, researched by: Ḥasan Muṣṭafāwī, Mashhad, University of Mashhad, 1348 Hijri Shamshi, p. 435.

individual, who knew of the close relationship between 'Alī and Imam Kāzīm ('a) (and who also knew that 'Alī would oftentimes send money and presents to the Imam), went to Hārūn and complained of him. He said to Hārūn: "He believes in the imamate of Mūsā ibn Ja'far ('a) and every year, he sends his khūms to him."

Then the man proceeded to tell the story of the clothing which had been sent to 'Alī from Hārūn. He said: "He sent the special (gold embroidered) robe, which the caliph gifted him on this specific date, to Mūsā ibn Ja'far." When Hārūn heard these words, he became enraged and said: "I must find out the truth of this matter; if your claims are true, I will kill 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn." Hārūn had 'Alī summoned immediately and questioned him about the gold embroidered robe that he had given him. 'Alī said to Hārūn: "I have put it in a pack and it is there right now."

Hārūn said: "Bring it here immediately!" 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn quickly sent one of his workers to retrieve the robe and said to him: "Go to this specific room in our house, get its key from the treasurer, unlock the door, then go to this specific chest and open it. When you have opened it, you will find a pack there; bring that pack with the seal intact." It was not long that the worker brought the pack of clothes, with the seal intact, and placed it in front of Hārūn. Hārūn ordered that the seal be broken and the pack opened. When the pack was opened, Hārūn saw that the exact same gold embroidered robe was there.

Hārūn's anger cooled and he said to 'Alī: "After this, I will never believe the words of any complainant against you." He then ordered that a very valuable reward be given to 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn. He then had 'Alī's accuser severely punished for what he had done.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Shaykh Mufid, *al-Irshād*, Qum, Maktabah Baṣīratī, p. 293.

- Shablanji, *Nūr al-Abṣār*, Cairo, Maktabah Mashhad al-Ḥusaynī, p. 150.

- Ibn Ṣabbāgh Mālikī, *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimma*, Najaf, Maktabah Dār al-Kutub al-Tijāriah, p. 218.

- Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Manāqib Āli Abī Ṭālib*, Qum, Mu'assasat al-Intishārāt 'Alāmah,

The Goal of Establishing an Islamic Government

Hārūn knew that Imam Kāẓim ('a) and his followers considered him as a usurper of the Prophet's (ṣ) government; he knew that they considered him as an oppressor who had taken control over the destiny of the Muslims through brute force. He also knew that if one day, these forces gained the power to fight against him, they would not hesitate to destroy his government. One conversation between Hārūn and the Imam ('a) illustrates this point very well.

One day Hārūn, perhaps as a means of testing the Imam ('a) and gaining an understanding of his goals, announced to the Imam ('a) that he was ready to return the property of Fadak back to him. The Imam ('a) said in response: "I am ready to receive Fadak on the condition that you return it to me with all of its limits and boundaries." Hārūn asked: "What are its limits and boundaries?" The Imam ('a) replied: "If I tell you its limits, you will never return it to me." Hārūn insisted and swore that he would return Fadak. The Imam ('a) delineated Fadak's boundaries in the following way: "The southernmost boundary is 'Adan, the easternmost boundary is Samarqand, the westernmost boundary is Africa, and the northernmost boundary is the land of Armenia and the Caspian Sea."

As Hārūn heard each of these limits, the color of his face gradually began to change, and with the description of the fourth boundary, he wasn't able to control himself and said with great anger: "With these boundaries, nothing will be left for us!" The Imam ('a) replied: "I knew that you would not accept and that is why I abstained from saying it."⁸⁶

With this answer, the Imam ('a) indirectly told Hārūn that Fadak was a metaphor for the entire Muslim

vol. 4, p. 289.

⁸⁶ Sibṭ ibn Jawzī, *Tadhkirah al-Khawāṣ*, Najaf, *Manshūrāt al-Maṭba'ah al-Haydariya*, 1383 Hijri Qamarī, p. 350.

- Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Manāqib Āli Abī Ṭālib*, Qum, *Mu'assasat al-Intishārāt 'Alāmah*, vol. 4, p. 320.

- Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfihānī, *al-Aghānī*, Beirut, *Dār Ahyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī*, vol. 5, p. 350.

government. When the people of Saqīfah took Fadak from Fātimah ('a) and Imam 'Alī ('a), this act was in reality the taking away of the rule of the Muslims from the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). Therefore, if Hārūn wished to truly return the right of the family of the Prophet, he would have to return the whole of the government back to them.

A Second Public Treasury

Although the caliphate was in the hands of Hārūn, the truth was that he only ruled over the bodies of the people and not over their hearts. The one who ruled over the hearts of the people was the Imam ('a). From all across the vast Muslim nation, people with insight and courage would send their wealth in the form of khūms and other Islamic taxes to the Imam ('a).

News that people from all across the nation were sending their money to the Imam ('a) was not hidden from Hārūn. In fact, he had many spies who reported this matter to him on a regular basis. The meaning behind these actions was also not hidden from Hārūn. He understood that this phenomenon meant that the people considered the Imam ('a) as their true leader. Things even reached the point that Hārūn's spies reported that Imam Kāzīm ('a) had formed a second public treasury in order to receive all of this wealth from the people.⁸⁷ This is an indication of the spiritual authority which the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) held over the people.

⁸⁷ Majlisī, Ibid, vol. 48, p. 232.

- Shablanjī, Ibid, p. 151.

- Ibn Šabbāgh Mālikī, Ibid, p. 220.

- Ibn Hajar Haytamī, al-Šawā'iq al-Muḥriqah, Cairo, Maktabah Cairo, p. 204.

In order to grasp the volume of how many people sent their money to the Imam (a), the following rough figure will prove helpful: "During the time of the martyrdom of Imam Kāzīm (a), 70,000 Dinars were with Ziyād ibn Marwān Qandī and 30,000 Dinars were with 'Alī ibn Abī Ḥamzah (two of the representatives of the Imam (a)). In addition to these sums, 30,000 Dinars were with 'Uthmān ibn 'Isā Rāwasī, who was the Imam's (a) representative in Egypt." (Majlisī, Ibid, vol. 48, p. 252-253).

The Eighth Imam
Imam ‘Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā

A Brief Look at the Life of the Imam

Imam 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā ('a) was born on the 11th day of Dhī al-Qa'dah, in the year 148 Hijrī.⁸⁸ His mother was a virtuous lady by the name of Tuktam, and she was given the name Ṭāhīrah by Imam Kāẓim ('a) after the birth of Imam Riḍā ('a).⁸⁹

Contemporary Caliphs

The period of his imamate was twenty years in duration; ten years was contemporary with the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashīd, five years with the caliphate of Muḥammad Amīn, and the last five years with the caliphate of 'Abdullah al-Ma'mūn. Imam Riḍā ('a) lived in Medina, the city of his birth, until the beginning of the caliphate of Ma'mūn. When Ma'mūn reached the caliphate, he invited the Imam ('a) to Khurāsān (the easternmost province of modern Iran), where he was martyred in the month of Ṣafar in the year 203 Hijrī. The Imam ('a) was 55 years old at the time of his martyrdom and he was buried in Khurāsān.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ṭabarsī, 'Ilām al-Warā Bi'llām al-Hūdā, Third Edition, Tehran, Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, p. 313.

- Kulaynī, al-Usūl Min al-Kāfi, Second Edition, Tehran, Maktabah Ṣadūq, 1381 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 486.

⁸⁹ Ṭabarsī, 'Ilām al-Warā Bi'llām al-Hūdā, Third Edition, Tehran, Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, p. 313.

- Majlisī, Biḥār al-Anwār, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1395 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 49, p. 5 and 7.

⁹⁰ Kulaynī, al-Usūl Min al-Kāfi, Second Edition, Tehran, Maktabah Ṣadūq, 1381 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 486.

- Shaykh Mufid, al-Irshād, Qum, Maktabah Baṣīratī, p. 304.

Imam Riḍā during the Time of Hārūn

In the year 183 Hijrī, Imam Kāẓim (‘a) was poisoned in prison in Baghdad, under the orders of Hārūn. After his martyrdom, the imamate passed on to his son, Imam Riḍā (‘a), and for 10 years his imamate was contemporary with Hārūn’s caliphate. This period can be counted as a period of relative freedom, as well as of religious and intellectual activity for the Imam (‘a). During this time period, Hārūn did not harass the Imam (‘a) and he was free to engage in various activities. Imam Riḍā (‘a) began to educate and train a group of students in the Quran and the Islamic sciences.

It is possible that the reason behind this period of relative freedom was Hārūn’s fear of repercussions for the murder of Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (‘a). Although Hārūn tried his utmost to keep the murder a secret, in the end, it became public knowledge and the news angered the people greatly. When word of the murder became public, Hārūn tried his best to exonerate himself of this crime. At one point, Hārūn wrote a letter to his uncle Sulaymān ibn Abī Ja‘far (who had been the individual who buried Imam Kāẓim (‘a)) saying: “May God curse Sandī ibn Shāhik, for he did this (Imam Kāẓim’s murder) without my permission.”⁹¹

Another piece of evidence in this matter is found in the words of Hārūn about Imam Kāẓim (‘a) in response to Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd Barmakī’s words. Yaḥyā, who had previously slandered and criticized Imam Kāẓim (‘a), said to Hārūn: “After Mūsā ibn Ja‘far (‘a), his son is now sitting in his place and making claims to the imamate.” He probably felt that Hārūn’s agents should keep an eye on ‘Alī ibn Mūsā (‘a) from that moment onwards, rather than waiting for something to happen. Hārūn, who had not yet forgotten the murder of Imam Kāẓim (‘a) and was continuously worried about its

⁹¹ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiyya, 1395 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 48, p. 227.

- Ṣadūq, *‘Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā (‘a)*, First Edition, Beirut, Mu‘assasah al-‘Alamī Lil Maṭbū‘āt, 1404 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 100.

consequences, replied: "Is not what we did to his father enough? Do you want me to take up a sword and kill all of the Alawīs at once?"⁹² Hārūn's anger quieted his officials and no one thereafter dared to bring up the matter of Imam Riḍā ('a).

Imam 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā ('a) used this opportunity during the rule of Hārūn and openly declared his imamate. There was no need to hide this matter as the previous Imams ('a) had been forced to do. This went to such an extent that some of the Imam's ('a) sincere companions cautioned him on this matter and the Imam ('a) assured them that not the least amount of harm would come to him from Hārūn.

Ṣafwān ibn Yaḥyā is quoted as saying: "When Imam Mūsā ibn Ja'far ('a) passed away and 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā ('a) openly declared his imamate and caliphate, the people said to the Imam ('a): 'You have made a serious and momentous declaration, and we are afraid for you, because of this oppressor (Hārūn al-Rashīd).' The Imam ('a) replied: 'As much as he will try, he will find no means of overcoming me.'⁹³

It has also been narrated from Muḥammad ibn Sunan⁹⁴ that: "I expressed the following to Abī al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā ('a) during the caliphate of Hārūn: 'You have declared the issue of your caliphate and imamate openly and have taken the place of your father, while blood still drips from the sword of Hārūn.' The Imam ('a) replied: 'The words of the Prophet (ṣ) give me strength and courage, for he said: If Abū Jahl was able to remove one hair from my head (cause

⁹² Ṣadūq, 'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā (a), First Edition, Beirut, Mu'assasah' Al-'Alamī Lil Matbū'āt, 1404 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 100.

- 'Alī ibn 'Isā al-'Irbilī, Kashf al-Ghammah, Tabriz, Maktabah Banī Hāshimī, 1381 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 3, p. 105.

⁹³ Ṣadūq, Ibid, p. 226.

- 'Alī ibn 'Isā, Ibid, vol. 2, p. 105.

⁹⁴ Kulaynī, al-Rawḍat Min al-Kāfi, Fourth Edition, Tehran, Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyah, 1362 Hijrī Shamsī, p. 257.

- Muḥaqiq, Sayyid 'Alī, The Life of the Eighth Imam, Imam 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (a), Qum, New Generation Publications, p. 52-59.

harm to me), then know that I am not a prophet, and so I say to you: If Hārūn is able to remove one hair from my head, then know that I am not an imam.⁹⁵

Amīn and Ma'mūn; Contrasts and Differences

During his caliphate, Hārūn appointed Muḥammad Amīn (whose mother was Zubayda) as his successor, and he took the people's pledge of allegiance for him. As a secondary successor, he selected 'Abdullah al-Ma'mūn, who had been born from an Iranian mother. In the year 193 Hijrī, news reached Hārūn that a revolt had erupted across Khurāsān, and the commanders of his military, in spite of their cruelty and lack of mercy, were unable to suppress it.

After consulting with his viziers and advisors, Hārūn considered it advisable that he personally travel to Khurāsān and suppress the rebellion himself. He left his son Muḥammad Amīn in Baghdad, and took his other son, Ma'mūn (who was incidentally the governor of Khurāsān) with him on the campaign. Hārūn was able to calm the turbulent conditions of Khurāsān, but he never returned back to Baghdad. He died on the third of Jamādī al-Ukhrā in the year 193 Hijrī in the city of Tūs, leaving his two sons to fight one another in a fierce power struggle over who would ultimately rule as the next caliph.⁹⁶

The Defeat of Amīn

On the night of Hārūn's demise, the people of Baghdad

⁹⁵ Later in Khurāsān, the Imam (a) remembered his situation and his popularity in this period in Medina and he mentioned to Ma'mūn that: "...This matter (the successorship) has by no means added to my blessings. When I was in Medina, my orders were obeyed in both the East and the West. During that time, I would mount my mule and calmly pass through the streets of Medina; there was no one more beloved and honored than myself in the city..." (Majlisī, Biḥār al-Anwār, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiyya, 1385 Hijrī Qamari, vol. 49, p. 155; Kulaynī, al-Rawḍat Min al-Kāfi, Fourth Edition, Tehran, Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1362 Hijrī Shamsi, p. 151; also refer to: Ṣadūq, 'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā, vol. 2, p. 167).

⁹⁶ Muhaqiq, Sayyid 'Alī, The Life of the Eighth Imam, Imam 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (a), Qum, New Generation Publications (Intishārāte Nasle Javān), p. 58-59.

pledged their allegiance to his son Muḥammad Amīn. No more than 18 days had passed from the start of Amīn's rule that he began to plan for the removal of Ma'mūn as his successor; he wished to instead appoint his own son Mūsā, for that position.

He consulted with his viziers, and all of them, with the exception of 'Alī ibn 'Isā ibn Mahān, advised against taking such an action. In spite of the almost unanimous consensus of his advisors, Amīn still decided to depose his brother. In reaction to this news, Ma'mūn announced his deposition of Amīn from the caliphate. After a series of bloody conflicts, Amīn was killed in the year 198 Hijrī.⁹⁷ After Amīn's killing, the rule of the entire nation was left in the hands of Ma'mūn.

Relative Freedom during the Rule of Amīn

During the rule of Amīn, and in general, during the years between the death of Hārūn and the caliphate of Ma'mūn, there are no historical records of conflict between the Imam ('a) and the 'Abbāsīd government. It is clear that in the few years of conflict between Amīn and Ma'mūn, the 'Abbāsīd government had neither the desire, nor the capacity to interfere with Imam Riḍā ('a) and the Alawīs. They were entangled in various domestic conflicts, which continued even after the battles over the successorship of the caliphate had concluded. Thus, we can consider the years 193 to 198 Hijrī to be years of relative freedom in regards to religious activity for the Imam ('a).⁹⁸

Who Was Ma'mūn?

Ma'mūn's mother was a Khurāsānian slave by the name of Marājil, who passed away several days after giving birth to him. As a result, Ma'mūn was an orphan from his infancy and was raised without a mother. Historians have written

⁹⁷ Ibn Athīr, *Al-Kāmil Fī Tārīkh*, Beirut, Dār Šādir, vol. 6, p. 287.

⁹⁸ Muhaqiq, Sayyid 'Alī, *The Life of the Eighth Imam*, Imam 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (a), Qum, New Generation Publications (Intishārāte Nasle Javān), p. 60.

that: "Ma'mūn's mother was the ugliest and dirtiest slave in Hārūn's kitchen, and this itself reveals the story behind her pregnancy."⁹⁹

Ma'mūn was born in the year 170 Hijrī, on the very same night that his father reached the caliphate, and he passed away in the year 218 Hijrī. Ma'mūn's upbringing was entrusted to Ja'far ibn Yaḥyā Barmakī. His teacher was Fadl ibn Sahl, who was famously known as Dhū al-Rīyāsah, and who later became Ma'mūn's vizier. The supreme commander of his army was Ṭāhir ibn Ḥusayn Dhū al-Yamīnayn.

Ma'mūn's Characteristics

The life of Ma'mūn was a life full of activity and struggle, devoid of easy living and comfort. This was in full contrast to his brother Amīn, who was raised in the lap of luxury. Amīn's mother was Zubayda, after all, and whoever comes to know how she lived, will come to understand to what extent Amīn's life was filled with self-indulgence and leisure. Ma'mūn, unlike his brother, did not feel that he came from nobility, and therefore was not sure about what the future held for him. In fact, he knew that the 'Abbāsids would never accept his caliphate, and that he lacked family support. For this reason, he figuratively rolled up his sleeves and began to plan for his future. Ma'mūn realized what he had to do from the moment that he discovered he possessed certain abilities and talents, which his brother Amīn did not.

⁹⁹ It is narrated that Zubayda would play chess with Hārūn, and because Hārūn lost a bet to her, she ordered that he would have to sleep with the ugliest girl who worked in his kitchen. Hārūn, who did not want to do such a thing, offered to give all of the taxes of Egypt and Iraq to Zubayda as a gift instead, but she did not accept. Hārūn reluctantly asked for a slave named Marajil, who was considered the ugliest and dirtiest slave in his kitchen, and slept with her. This story is not inconsistent with the fact that Hārūn reached the caliphate on the night that he was born, for the successors ruled over vast tracts of land and possessed great amounts of wealth even before becoming caliphs. For example, even Hārūn divided his country between three of his sons during his lifetime. (Murtadā al-Ḥusaynī, Sayyid Ja'far, *The Political Life of the Eighth Imam*, translated by Sayyid Khalil Khalilian, Fourth Edition, Tehran, The Office of Islamic Cultural Publications, 1365 Hijrī Shamshī, p. 97.)

Ma'mūn quickly adapted himself and began to learn from Amīn's weaknesses. For example, when Faḍl witnessed Amīn's inclinations towards music and festive gatherings, he instructed Ma'mūn to show himself as being pious, religious, and well-natured. Ma'mūn would then act in this very manner, and every time Amīn would do something badly, Ma'mūn would perform that same action in a graceful and competent manner.

In due time, Ma'mūn gained expertise in various sciences and attained a high level of knowledge for himself. He proved himself to be superior to all of his peers, and even excelled over the whole of the 'Abbāsīd clan. Some would proclaim that there was no one more knowledgeable from among the 'Abbāsīds, than Ma'mūn.

Ibn Nadīm has said the following about Ma'mūn: "He was the most aware of the caliphs in jurisprudence and theology." It has also been narrated about Imam 'Alī ('a), that one day he was speaking about the 'Abbāsīds, when he mentioned: "The seventh one from among them will be the most knowledgeable."

Suyūṭī, Ibn Taghri Bardī, and Ibn Shākir Katbī have praised Ma'mūn with the following words: "In terms of far-sightedness, will-power, patience, knowledge, cleverness, courage, generosity, and preeminence (over his peers), he was the best man from among the 'Abbāsīds, even though these characteristics were marred by his belief in the created nature of the Quran." Even Ma'mūn's father testified to his superiority over his brother Amīn and said: "I have decided to amend the successorship and hand it over to one whose behavior I approve of more, whose course of action I praise, in whose politics I have trust, and of whose lack of weakness I am assured of— this is none other than 'Abdullah. But the 'Abbāsīds, out of their own personal desires, want Muḥammad, even though he is completely submerged in his base desires, and is wasteful, extravagant, and lets women and female slaves become his partners in decision making. This is

while 'Abdullah behaves in a positive manner and has uncorrupted judgment. Truly, he is best suited for the caliphate..."¹⁰⁰

The Eighth Imam during the Time of Ma'mūn

With the stabilization of Ma'mūn's caliphate, the Imam's ('a) life also began to change; this was a change where the Imam ('a) began to live under increasing levels of hardship and difficulty. The caliphs, whether they belonged to the 'Abbāsid dynasty or the Umayyid dynasty, all feared the Alawīs above everything else. These were individuals whom the majority of the masses had accepted as having the right of rule over the Muslim nation. In addition to this, they witnessed the existence of every type of virtue in these people. It was for this reason that the descendants of 'Alī ('a) were always subject to torture and persecution from the caliphs of their time. In addition to the torture and persecution, many of these descendants were also murdered by the caliphs.

Outwardly, Ma'mūn would occasionally make a pretense of being inclined towards Shiism. The reason behind this was that many of the people in his government were Iranians who happened to be inclined towards the descendants of Imam 'Alī ('a) and the Shia Imams ('a). For this reason, Ma'mūn was unable to imprison Imam Riḍā ('a), unlike his predecessors Hārūn and Maṣṣūr. Not only was he unable to imprison him, but he wasn't even able to persecute him like his predecessors had been free to do.

In order to meet his goals and neutralize the danger which he felt from the Imam ('a), he was forced to come up with a more nuanced method than the previous caliphs. This method, although not unprecedented, was better from a public relations standpoint. As a result, many later caliphs adopted similar methods in order to strengthen their rule.

¹⁰⁰ Murtaḍā al-Ḥusaynī, Sayyid Ja'far, *The Political Life of the Eighth Imam*, translated by Sayyid Khalīl Khalīlīan, Fourth Edition, Tehran, The Office of Islamic Cultural Publications, 1365 Hijri Shamshi, p. 97-100.

Ma'mūn decided to take Imam Riḍā ('a) to Marw, the administrative center of his government, and make a show of friendship and kindness towards him. His ulterior motive in doing so, was to keep a close eye on the Imam and his activities. Furthermore, his government would benefit from the Imam's ('a) great knowledge and social standing. From both perspectives, it was of great benefit to Ma'mūn.

Why Did Ma'mūn Wish to Turn Over the Caliphate to Imam Riḍā?

Ma'mūn's Invitation of the Imam to Khurāsān

At first, Ma'mūn invited Imam Riḍā ('a), as well as the notables from the descendants of Imam 'Alī ('a), to come to Khurāsān, in a very polite manner.¹⁰¹ The Imam ('a) did not accept Ma'mūn's invitation initially, but Ma'mūn kept insisting. Many letters exchanged hands, until, Imam Riḍā ('a) finally began to travel towards Marw with a group of the Alawīs.¹⁰²

Ma'mūn ordered Julūdī, (or according to other narrations, Rajā' ibn Abī Ḍahak), who was in charge of the Imam's ('a) caravan, to act very respectfully towards the travelers and to the Imam ('a) in particular. In spite of this, and in order to raise awareness in the masses, Imam Riḍā ('a) openly showed his displeasure with the trip. On the day that he was set to depart from Medina, he gathered all of his family together and asked them to cry for him, saying: "I will not return to my family again."¹⁰³ Then, Imam Riḍā ('a)

¹⁰¹ In various historical documents, there is no initial mention of any successorship or caliphate in the invitation of the Imam (a) to Khurāsān. This was possibly an afterthought which occurred to Ma'mūn later. Even if the idea had occurred to him earlier, he did not mention it publicly.

¹⁰² 'Alī ibn 'Īsā al-'Irbilī, *Kashf al-Ghammah*, Tabriz, Maktabah Banī Hāshimī, 1381 Hijri Qamarī, vol. 3, p. 65.

- Shaykh Mufid, *al-Irshād*, Qum, Maktabah Baṣīratī, p. 309.

- Fattāl Nayshābūrī, *Rawḍat al-Wā'izīn*, First Edition, Beirut, Mu'assat al-'Alamī Lil Maṭbū'āt, 1406 Hijri Qamarī, p. 247.

¹⁰³ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1385 Hijri Qamarī, vol. 49,

entered the Mosque of the Prophet (ﷺ), in order to say his farewells to the Messenger. Several times the Imam (‘a) gave his farewell to the Prophet (ﷺ) and began to leave, when he would once again return to the grave and weep in a loud voice.

Makhūl Sīstānī has narrated: “At this time, I went to the Imam (‘a), gave my greetings, and wished him well on his journey. He said: ‘Makhūl, look at me closely; I am going to be separated far from my grandfather, and I will die alone, and I will be buried next to Hārūn.’”¹⁰⁴ The caravan of the Imam (‘a) traveled from Medina to Marw by passing through Baṣrah, Ahwāz, and Fars. This travel route was probably chosen so that the caravan would not pass through Jabal, Kūfah, Kermanshah, and Qum,¹⁰⁵ which were known as Shia cities.¹⁰⁶

Entering the Capital City

The Imam’s caravan entered Marw on the tenth of Shawwal. With several farsakhs remaining between him and the city, the Imam (‘a) was greeted by Ma’mūn, Faḍl ibn Sahl, and a large group of the notables from the ‘Abbāsids. He entered the city with great respect and honor, and Ma’mūn ordered that all means of comfort and rest be supplied for the Imam (‘a). After several days spent resting from the long journey, discussions began between Imam Riḍā (‘a) and Ma’mūn, and Ma’mūn suggested that the caliphate be given over at once to the Imam (‘a). The Imam (‘a) strongly rejected

p. 117. Also refer to: ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā al-‘Irbilī, *Ibid*, vol. 3, p. 95.

¹⁰⁴ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 49, p. 117.

¹⁰⁵ The late Sayyid ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn Ṭāwūs, the author of *Farḥat al-Qūrā* (d. 693 Hījri), has narrated a piece of commentary on the entrance of the Imam (a) to Qum; this narration is not mentioned by any other source. If we consider that Shaykh Ṣadūq himself was a resident of Qum and did not mention anything about the Imam’s (a) passage through his city, and instead mentioned another route of travel, then the narration of Ibn Ṭāwūs does not seem to be authentic. (Muhaqiq, Sayyid ‘Alī, *The Life of the Eighth Imam, Imam ‘Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (a), Qum, New Generation Publications (Intishārāte Nasle Javān)*, p. 74.)

¹⁰⁶ Muhaqiq, *Ibid*, p. 70-74.

this suggestion.

Faḍl ibn Sahl later mentioned this event with amazement. He said: "I never saw the caliphate as being so worthless and abject as on that day. Ma'mūn would try to turn over the caliphate to 'Alī ibn Mūsā ('a) and he would reject it outrightly."¹⁰⁷ Ma'mūn, who had perhaps gauged such a reaction from the Imam ('a), then said: "Now that it is so, accept the successorship." Imam Riḍā ('a) replied: "Exempt me from this as well."

Ma'mūn did not accept this and spoke with anger; his words took on a more menacing tone. He said: "When 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb was passing away, he organized a council of six individuals, and one of those individuals was Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a); he recommended that whoever would object should have his head cut off... you, too, must accept my suggestion, for I do not see any other way but this."¹⁰⁸ He also threatened Imam Riḍā ('a) in even more explicit terms by saying: "You are always moving in opposition to my wishes and consider yourself secure from me. I swear by God that if you do not accept this proposal I will force you to do so, and if you still do not comply, then I will kill you."¹⁰⁹

Without having a choice, the Imam ('a) accepted Ma'mūn's suggestion and said: "I will accept the successorship on the condition that I will never have authority over matters of state, and that I will have no mediation in matters of electing and removing governors, judges, or jurisprudents."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ 'Alī ibn 'Isā al-'Irbilī, *Kashf al-Ghammah*, Tabriz, Maktabah Banī Hāshimī, 1381 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 3, p. 66.

- Shaykh Mufid, *al-Irshād*, Qum, Maktabah Baṣīratī, p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ Shaykh Mufid, *al-Irshād*, Qum, Maktabah Baṣīratī, p. 310.

- 'Alī ibn 'Isā al-'Irbilī, *Kashf al-Ghammah*, Tabriz, Maktabah Banī Hāshimī, 1381 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 3, p. 65.

- Ṭabarsī, *'Ilām al-Warā Bi-'Ilām al-Hūdā*, Third Edition, Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, p. 333.

¹⁰⁹ Ṣadūq, *'Ilāl al-Sharāya'*, Qum, Manshūrāt Maktabah Ṭabāṭabā'i, vol. 1, p. 226.

- Fattāl Nayshābūrī, *Rawḍat al-Wā'izīn*, First Edition, Beirut, Mu'assat al-'Alami Lil Maṭbū'āt, 1406 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 247.

¹¹⁰ Ṭabarsī, *'Ilām al-Warā Bi-'Ilām al-Hūdā*, Third Edition, Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-

The Successorship Which Never Reached Fruition

The people of Marw were preparing themselves for the fast of the month of Ramaḍān (in the year 201 Hijrī), when news of the successorship of the Imam ('a) spread through the city. The city was swept with a wave of happiness, albeit tempered with surprise. On Monday, the seventh of Ramaḍān, the declaration of the successorship was written out in Ma'mūn's handwriting, and on the back of that same paper, Imam 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā ('a) added a foreword to the letter announcing his acceptance. He also surprised the people by explicitly telling them that this matter would not come to fruition—that he would not become the next caliph. Then on the side of that same paper, various governors and military leaders, such as Yaḥyā ibn Aktham, 'Abdullah ibn Ṭāhir, and Faḍl ibn Sahl bore witness to the document.¹¹¹

An official ceremony was then held on Thursday, which was the tenth of that month. The first person who was ordered to pledge his allegiance to the Imam ('a) was 'Abbās, the son of Ma'mūn. After him, Faḍl ibn Sahl, the grand vizier of Ma'mūn, Yaḥyā ibn Aktham, the court scholar, and then 'Abdullah ibn Ṭāhir, the commander of Ma'mūn's army all gave their pledge. Then, the 'Abbāsids and other notables proceeded to come forward and give their pledge to the Imam ('a).¹¹²

The matter of the Imam's ('a) successorship was naturally a cause for much joy amongst his followers and friends, but he himself expressed sadness over the matter. When the Imam ('a) saw a man who was showing a great deal of happiness over the successorship, he said to the man: "Do not take this

Islāmīya, p. 334.

- Shaykh Mufīd, al-Irshād, Qum, Maktabah Baṣīrati, p. 310.

¹¹¹ 'Alī ibn 'Īsā al-'Irbilī is quoted as saying: "I personally witnessed this agreement, which was written in the handwriting of the Imam (a) and Ma'mūn, in the year 670 Hijrī." He also copied the text of that document and reproduced it in his book Kashf al-Ghammah (vol. 3, p. 123-128).

¹¹² Muhaqiq, Sayyid 'Alī, The Life of the Eighth Imam, Imam 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (a), Qum, New Generation Publications (Intishārāte Nasle Javān), p. 82-87.

matter to heart and do not become happy over it, for it will not last."

The Political Difficulties of Ma'mūn

If one were to research the conditions and the political situation under the rule of Ma'mūn, historical documents will show that he was beset with a series of difficult political issues, which he continuously strived to free himself from. To solve these issues, he created a multi-faceted plan of action—the successorship of Imam Riḍā ('a) was in fact one facet of this plan.

1- The Dissatisfaction of the 'Abbāsids with Ma'mūn

Although Ma'mūn was considered a worthier ruler than his brother Amīn as far as the masses were concerned, still, the 'Abbāsids opposed his rule. Hārūn was quite aware of the stark differences between his two sons and so he would complain of the 'Abbāsids' opposition to the rule of Ma'mūn.

It is possible that the 'Abbāsids opposed Ma'mūn because they considered his brother Amīn to be a pure 'Abbāsīd, for his father was Hārūn and his mother was Zubayda. Zubayda was both a Hāshimī and the grandchild of Maṣṣūr Dawānīqī; she was considered as one of the most noble of the 'Abbāsīd women. Amīn was raised by Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā Barmakī, the foster brother of Hārūn, and the most influential man in his court. In addition to all of this, his teacher was Faḍl ibn Rabī.

Ma'mūn, on the other hand, was raised by Ja'far ibn Yaḥyā, whose court influence was considerably less than his brother Faḍl. Secondly, his teacher was an individual whom the 'Abbāsids did not like, for he was accused of having inclinations towards the Alawīs. Also, there existed a great deal of enmity and hatred between Amīn's teacher (Faḍl ibn Rabī) and Ma'mūn's teacher. Faḍl ibn Sahl Irānī later became the grand vizier of Ma'mūn. The 'Abbāsids feared the Iranians, and as soon as they were able to, they transferred

their positions over to the Turks and people of other nationalities.

2- Amīn's Superior Position

Amīn possessed very powerful relatives and companions who worked towards strengthening his power and position. These individuals included the likes of his uncles, as well as Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā Barmakī (in fact, the majority of the Barmakīs can be listed here), and his mother Zubayda. If we consider that these individuals possessed a great deal of influence in Hārūn's government and were instrumental in his government's politics, it is obvious as to why Hārūn ended up following their wishes and selecting his younger son Amīn for the successorship. He only appointed his elder son Ma'mūn for the successorship after Amīn.

It is also possible that the tribal loyalties of the 'Abbāsids, and likewise, the great rank of 'Īsā ibn Ja'far (the uncle of Amīn) played an important role in the nomination of Amīn for Hārūn's successorship. Zubayda also played an instrumental role in her son's nomination. Even beyond these crucial issues, the Arabs of that time had very specific beliefs in regards to lineage, and it is a strong possibility that Hārūn selected Amīn over Ma'mūn for this reason. Some historians have expressed this opinion in the following manner: "In 176 Hījri, Hārūn gave the successorship to his son Amīn. Ma'mūn was one month older than Amīn, but Amīn was the son of Zubayda, who was the daughter of Ja'far and a Hāshimī. This was while Ma'mūn was the son of a slave named Marajil, who had passed away shortly after giving birth."

What Was Ma'mūn's Situation in regards to the Caliphate?

Although Ma'mūn's father had nominated him for the secondary successorship which would come about after Amīn's death, this was still no guarantee that he would ever

be able to rule; his future was therefore completely uncertain. Ma'mūn couldn't be sure that his brother and the 'Abbāsids would not break their pledge and depose him. As a result, Ma'mūn was not confident as to whom he could trust in order to support his aspirations to be caliph.

How could Ma'mūn gain the caliphate and take on the reins of power? And if he were to potentially reach the caliphate, how would he strengthen the foundations of his rule? These were the questions which continuously occupied Ma'mūn's mind. He knew that he would have to quickly find the answers to these questions and he decided to act sooner than later. Ma'mūn began to search for people who would support him in the coming dangers and battles that would ensue in his fight for power. In order to understand who his potential supporters were, we have to consider the spheres of influence which existed at that time:

1- The Position of the Alawīs towards Ma'mūn

Naturally, the Alawīs did not support Ma'mūn. Not only did they not support Ma'mūn, but in fact they did not support any of the 'Abbāsids, for they had far worthier candidates in mind for the position of the caliphate. In addition to this, Ma'mūn was affiliated to a clan that had harassed and persecuted the descendants of Imam 'Alī ('a) to a far greater extent than even the Umayyids. There was no love lost between the 'Abbāsids and the Alawīs. It is well-known how much Alawī blood the 'Abbāsids spilled, and how they seized their wealth and exiled them from various cities. From the perspective of the Alawīs, it was enough of a stain to be the son of Hārūn al-Rashīd, an individual who had committed numerous crimes against them and their Imams ('a).

2- The Position of the Arabs towards Ma'mūn and His Rule

The Arabs also opposed the rule of Ma'mūn due to the

reason that his mother, his teacher, and his 'manager of affairs' were all non-Arabs. This did not go over well with the Arabs of that time period, whose worldview was exceedingly tribalistic. The Iranians in particular, who, with their specialized skills were so indispensable in ruling over such a large empire, had made the Arabs very nervous. In these circumstances, it was natural that the Arabs would be sensitive towards the Iranians and towards whomever had close contact with them. Due to Ma'mūn's close relationship with this group, he was the focus of a great deal of Arab anger and suspicion.

3- The Killing of Amīn

Although the killing of Amīn was a great military victory for Ma'mūn, it was not without negative consequences for him, particularly in regards to his plans and goals. The methods which Ma'mūn adopted in the conflict with his brother Amīn, only exacerbated these negative consequences. For example, he ordered Tāhir to execute Amīn, and when the head was brought to him, he prostrated in thanks and gave 1,000,000 dirhams to the individual who had brought him the head. He then ordered that his brother's head be placed on a wooden plank in his royal court, so that anyone who came to the palace to receive their salary would have to first curse the head and then receive their wages.

Ma'mūn did not suffice with these actions— he ordered that the head of Amīn be taken and paraded in Khurāsān. He then had the head sent to Ibrāhīm ibn Mahdī and rebuked him for grieving over the death of Amīn. Ma'mūn, through killing his brother and displaying his head in such a savage manner, naturally elicited a very negative response from the people. At the very least, it can be said that he damaged his reputation in the eyes of the people, shook their trust in him, and aroused their enmity and disgust.

A Difficult Situation

In addition to this, it was the people of Khurāsān who had played an instrumental role in bringing Ma'mūn to power. Now, they had turned away from him and were considered as a threat to his rule. In the midst of this situation, the Alawīs used the conflict between Ma'mūn and his brother Amīn to their benefit as a means of increasing the scope of their activities. Ma'mūn was placed in an increasingly difficult position, and a growing number of revolts by the Alawīs began erupting from various regions of the nation.

The Revolts of the Alawīs

Abū al-Sarāyā, who was once on Ma'mūn's side, engaged in a revolt in the city of Kūfah against him. However, his army was routinely routed, and he could not hold on to the territories he conquered for very long. It has been mentioned that, in spite of this, 200,000 of the caliph's forces were killed in this rebellion, even though the entirety of the revolt did not last more than ten months.

Revolts began to spring up in other cities as well:

- In Baṣrah, which was a stronghold of the Uthmānīs, the Alawīs rose in revolt under the leadership of Zayd al-Nār.
- In Mecca and the territories of the Ḥijāz, Muḥammad ibn Ja'far, who was known as Dhībāj, revolted and was even called Amīr al-Mu'minīn by his followers.
- In Yemen, Ibrāhīm ibn Mūsā ibn Ja'far also revolted against Ma'mūn.
- In Medina, Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān ibn Ḥasan revolted.
- In Wāsiṭ, where the majority of the people leaned towards the Uthmānīs, Ja'far ibn Zayd ibn 'Alī and Ḥusayn ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Hassan ibn 'Alī, likewise,

revolted.

- In Madā'in, Muḥammad ibn Ismā'il ibn Muḥammad revolted.

In conclusion, there was no region in which the Alawīs, either under their own initiative or due to the will of the people, rose up in revolt against the 'Abbāsids. Things even reached the point that the people of Bayn al-Nahrayn (between the two rivers; i.e. the Tigris and the Euphrates) and Syria, who were famous for their cooperation and collaboration with the Umayyids and the family of Marwān, began to follow Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Alawī (the close companion of Abū al-Sarāyā) and wrote him a letter stating that they were waiting for his representative to arrive in order to convey his command to their people.¹³

A Multi-faceted Solution

Ma'mūn had understood that in order to save himself from these problems, he would have to accomplish several things:

- 1- He would have to first quell the Alawī revolts.
- 2- He would need to have the Alawīs acknowledge that the 'Abbāsid government was a legitimate government.
- 3- Undermine the people's love and respect for the Alawīs.
- 4- Gain the trust and love of the Arabs.
- 5- Gain the acknowledgment of his government's legitimacy from the Khurāsānians in particular and the Iranians overall.
- 6- Keep the 'Abbāsids and their supporters satisfied.
- 7- Regain the trust of the masses. Due to the killing of his brother, he had lost a great deal of the people's trust and his reputation had fallen drastically.
- 8- Lastly, Ma'mūn wished to somehow secure himself from the danger that he felt from Imam Riḍā ('a).

¹³ Murtaḍā al-Ḥusaynī, Sayyid Ja'far, *The Political Life of the Eighth Imam*, translated by Sayyid Khalil Khalilīan, Fourth Edition, Tehran, The Office of Islamic Cultural Publications, 1365 Hijri Shamshi, p. 97-123. Summarized and with slight differences in word usage.

Through the successorship of the Imam ('a) and his participation in the government, many of Ma'mūn's goals would be secured. Since Imam Riḍā ('a) was the leader of the Alawīs, his successorship would in effect disarm the Alawīs and remove the main reason behind their many revolts. As a result, they would also lose public support for their revolts.

From another perspective, Ma'mūn would gain the support of the Khurāsānians and the Iranians who were all supporters of the family of the Prophet. He could also then rationalize the killing of his brother, under the pretense of handing over the government to the family of the Prophet.

In addition to all of these reasons, Ma'mūn, through bringing the Imam ('a) to Marw (which was his center of power) became relatively safe from the dangers that he felt from him. In Marw, he would be under the watchful eye of Ma'mūn and his activities could be somewhat controlled. Out of all the groups mentioned, only the Arabs and the 'Abbāsids were left, and Ma'mūn felt that he could put them in check with the support of the Iranians and the Alawīs.

Criticism and Deliberation

There exists a great deal of clear historical evidence, which calls into question Ma'mūn's sincerity in giving the successorship to Imam Riḍā ('a). If Ma'mūn had sincerely wanted to give the caliphate over to the Imam ('a), then the question remains as to why he did not perform the following actions:

- 1- Why didn't Ma'mūn give the successorship over to the Imam ('a) while he was in Medina? Why did he bring the Imam ('a), along with an entourage of his agents to Marw, when the Imam himself did not want to do so? Ma'mūn could have simply made a public announcement and furnished the necessary documents and had witnesses sign them without the Imam ('a) ever needing to travel to Marw.
- 2- Why did Ma'mūn order that Imam Riḍā ('a) be brought through the way of Baṣrah, Ahwāz, and Fars, which happened

to be a very difficult route since it passed through extremely hot climates and probably also passed through the harsh salt desert of Lūt? Why was the Imam ('a) not taken through the route of Kūfah and Qum, in which he would have been welcomed enthusiastically, thus giving Ma'mūn's goal in transferring the successorship a higher potential for success?

3- Why did Ma'mūn, in his first round of discussions with the Imam ('a), name himself as the Imam's successor? He could have given the successorship of Imam Riḍā ('a) to his son Imam Jawād ('a) or at least left the choice up to him.

4- When we consider that the Imam ('a) was approximately 20 years older than Ma'mūn, then based on ordinary calculations, it could naturally be expected that the Imam ('a) would pass away sooner than Ma'mūn. Therefore, making someone who is expected to pass away sooner than you your successor does not make much sense.

5- If Ma'mūn was engaging in these actions out a sense of faith and conviction, why did he still force the Imam ('a) into accepting the successorship when the Imam ('a) outrightly refused his offer?

6- Why did Ma'mūn not pass on the successorship to Imam Jawād ('a) after the death of his father? This was while he would express the same affection and love towards Imam Jawād ('a) as he would towards his father, Imam Riḍā ('a).

7- Why did Ma'mūn, in the famous event of the 'Īd prayers, force the Imam ('a) to return?

8- When Ma'mūn left Marw in order to return to Baghdad, why didn't he allow the Imam ('a) to stay in Marw? If the Imam ('a) was to be the successor, what was the issue with him remaining in Marw and ruling that region?

These are questions which clearly indicate that Ma'mūn was not sincere and truthful in his offer of the successorship. There were indeed ulterior motives which caused him to propose the offer of the successorship, which we will discuss

in the following pages, God willing.¹¹⁴

The Reasons behind the Acceptance

Imam Riḍā ('a) accepted the successorship of Ma'mūn only when he judged that if he continued to refuse, not only would he lose his own life, but the lives of the Alawīs and his companions would be in danger as well. It was necessary for the Imam ('a) to protect the lives of his Shias, as well as his own life, as the Muslim nation was in dire need of his guidance and teachings.

If the Imam ('a) had given a definitive refusal to the successorship, then it was clear that he and his companions would be killed. It is not, however, clear if this sacrifice would have had the same effect as the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn ('a). In addition to this, reaching this station of successorship was an implicit acknowledgment from the 'Abbāsids that the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt deserved a significant share in the government.

On another level, the successorship allowed the people to see the family of the Prophet (ṣ) active on the political stage. Through these means, they would not mistakenly assume that the Imams ('a) were only religious scholars and jurists, without any relevance in the management of the worldly affairs of the Muslims. It is possible that when Ibn 'Urfah asked Imam Riḍā ('a) a question about his successorship, the Imam's ('a) answer was in reference to this reality. One day, Ibn 'Urfah asked the Imam ('a): "Oh son of the Prophet of God, what was your reason for accepting the successorship?" Imam Riḍā ('a) answered: "The same reason whereby my grandfather 'Alī ('a) was compelled to enter into the 'council.'"¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Muhaqiq, Sayyid 'Alī, *The Life of the Eighth Imam: Imam 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā*, Qum, New Generation Publications (Intishārāt Nasle Javān), p. 138-141.

¹¹⁵ Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Manāqib Āli Abī Ṭālib*, Qum, Mu'assasat al-Intishārāt 'Alāmah, vol. 4, p. 364.

- Ṣadūq, *'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā (a)*, First Edition, Beirut, Mu'assasah' Al-'Alamī Lil Maṭbū'āt, 1404 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 2, p. 141.

Above and beyond all these issues, Imam Riḍā ('a) showed the true face of Ma'mūn during the matter of his successorship. Through revealing Ma'mūn's true intentions, any reasonable doubt was removed from the collective minds of the people as to who was ruling over them.

Did the Imam Wish to become the Successor?

The factors mentioned above do not reveal the personal inclinations of Imam Riḍā ('a) in the matter of the successorship. As later events proved, Imam Riḍā ('a) knew that he could not save himself from the plots of Ma'mūn and his companions. He also knew quite well that his life would not be spared by them. Moreover, the Imam ('a) understood that Ma'mūn would use all the means at his disposal to destroy him, whether physical (such as killing him), or propagandistic (such as attempting to destroy his standing in the society).

Even if we were to assume that Ma'mūn held no evil intentions, still, in view of the Imam's ('a) age, it is extremely unlikely that he would have lived to take on the caliphate. Therefore, none of these reasons were strong enough to support the acceptance of the successorship by Imam Riḍā ('a). It is an action which does not make apparent sense from his perspective. If we were to disregard these issues and assume that the Imam ('a) hoped to live until after Ma'mūn, even in such a case, his confrontation with the influential elements in the government who were opposed to him was inevitable. Likewise, the plots of the 'Abbāsids and their followers, and the mobilization of those who opposed the government of the Imam ('a) due to their own personal self-interest and greed, left the Imam ('a) in a disadvantageous and dangerous situation.

- Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1395 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 49, p. 140.

The Only Correct Stance Was to Take an Oppositional Stance

In view of what has been mentioned above, it can be understood why the Imam ('a) would reject such a dangerous and harmful means of reaching the caliphate. This path was one where none of the Imam's goals could be fulfilled, and in fact, posed a great danger to himself, as well as to his followers and indeed the entirety of his movement. Therefore, an affirmative response to the offer of the successorship would have been considered not just illogical, but even suicidal.

The Imam's Opposition to Ma'mūn's Suggestion

As a result of this difficult situation, the Imam ('a) was stuck between a rock and a hard place. If he accepted the offer, then nothing would come of it as Ma'mūn would outlive the Imam, either because of the age gap or by having him killed. In addition to this, Ma'mūn would be able to create policies which he would brand as having been written by the Imam ('a) himself. However, if the Imam ('a) refused the offer, this refusal posed its own set of unique problems. On a basic level, it is clear that Ma'mūn would have used it as a pretext to have the Imam executed. Therefore, Imam Riḍā ('a) used a unique approach towards the matter of the successorship, which included elements and strategies which even the clever Ma'mūn was not able to foresee. Ultimately, this strategy ended up neutralizing Ma'mūn's meticulous plans. The Imam's strategy consisted of the following:

The First Element: Rejecting the Suggestion of Successorship

For as long as Imam Riḍā ('a) was in Medina, he continuously rejected Ma'mūn's suggestions for the successorship. The Imam ('a) continued to publicly show himself as being completely opposed to the successorship

until it was proven to the people that Ma'mūn would not take no for an answer. Even historical texts (which tend to narrate from the perspective of those who hold power) mention that the Imam's ('a) journey from Medina to Marw did not come from his own personal will but rather from force and compulsion.

The taking of such a stance by the Imam ('a) was designed to show the people that he would not be a subject of Ma'mūn's trickery and that he was fully aware of the caliph's secret intentions and machinations. By doing this, the Imam ('a) was able to remove any doubt people had in regards to his nomination as the successor.

The Second Element: Not Getting the Family Involved

Although Ma'mūn had asked the Imam ('a) to bring anyone that he wished from his family to Marw, the Imam ('a) refused, and he didn't even bring his son Jawād ('a). This was while the journey was fairly long, and supposedly of immense importance, since it was— at least on the surface— one in which the Imam ('a) would take up the leadership of the Muslim nation.

The Third Element: Getting Back to the Basics

During a stop in Nayshābūr, the Imam ('a) showed himself to a crowd of tens of thousands— or possibly even hundreds of thousands— who had come to greet him. He then recited the following tradition: “God, the most High, has said: ‘The expression of Tawhīd (لا اله الا الله) is my fortress, and whoever enters my fortress will be secure from my punishment.’”

On that day, this tradition was written down by approximately 20,000 individuals as soon as it was recited by the Imam ('a). It is interesting to note that the Imam ('a), under the conditions he was in, did not speak of any secondary issues of religion or the life of the people. He did not speak about prayer, fasting, or even encourage the people

towards abstaining from various worldly affairs. In spite of being on a political journey to Marw, he did not bring up any political issues either and he did not speak about his own personal situation.

Instead of all these issues, the Imam ('a) focused their attention on something which was the most important issue of their lives, both at that time and for posterity. During that critical time period, the Imam ('a) only brought forward the issue of monotheism, for monotheism is the foundation of a virtuous life, through which entire nations have rescued themselves from difficulties and hardships. If any individual forgets the matter of Tawhīd, then, in reality, he has lost everything. The Imam ('a), with this sentence, and with the sentence which he mentioned a few moments later, wished to remind the Muslim nation, that in spite of all of its vastness and power, it was lacking in this critical reality.

The Relationship between Wilāyah and Tawhīd

After reciting this tradition on monotheism, the caravan of the Imam ('a) continued on its way, with thousands of people still looking on. The people were still engaged in thought when suddenly the caravan halted once again and the Imam ('a) leaned out of the coach and mentioned some additional words. He said in a loud and far reaching voice: "The expression of Tawhīd also has certain stipulations, and I am one of its stipulations."

Here, the Imam ('a) expressed another foundational issue, which is that of Wilāyah (Guardianship). Wilāyah is much like the trunk of a tree, while Tawhīd is its root. Indeed, if the masses do not attach themselves to the matter of Wilāyah, then they will continuously be ruled by oppressors and illegitimate rulers. These oppressors will naturally consider law making, which is God's right alone, to be their own right. Through these means, they will drag the Muslim nation into hardship and wretchedness...

Moreover, if we truly understand the matter of Wilāyah,

we will understand that the sentence of the Imam ('a): "And I am from its stipulations," was not said from a sense of self regard, but rather to illustrate a very essential and foundational matter. It is interesting to note that before reciting this tradition, the Imam ('a) also mentioned its chain of narrators, and in this manner, he helped the people understand that this tradition is the word of God, which was narrated from the Imam's father, grandfather, and so on, until this chain reached the Prophet of God (ṣ). This manner of reciting a tradition amongst the Imams ('a) is quite rare, and it was used in this specific case to connect the issue of the leadership of the Muslim nation to the issue of the oneness of God. It was also used to introduce the family tree of the Imams ('a) to the Muslims.

In front of thousands of people in the city of Nayshābūr, in the midst of an exceedingly sensitive political situation, Imam Riḍā ('a) introduced himself as the guardian of the fortress of monotheism. Through this, he neutralized Ma'mūn's most important goal, for Ma'mūn, through bringing Imam Riḍā ('a) to Marw, had intended to make the statement that his government was legitimate and Islamic.

The Fourth Element: Circumventing the Conspiracy

When Imam Riḍā ('a) reached Marw, many months passed in discussions with Ma'mūn, through which he still refused the successorship. He did not accept the offer of the caliphate, nor the offer of the successorship. Both of these were continuously rejected, until Ma'mūn became enraged and began to threaten the Imam's life.

Through holding this specific position against Ma'mūn, the Imam ('a) forced Ma'mūn to face the reality of the situation. The Imam ('a) said: "I wish to do something so that the people do not say that 'Alī ibn Mūsā has inclined towards the world (dunyā), but it is in fact the world that is following him." Through this stance, he had Ma'mūn understand that his stratagem was not going to be successful, and that in the

future, he would have to give up his machinations. In addition to this, the Imam ('a) created doubt in the hearts of the masses against Ma'mūn and his rule.

The Fifth Element: Foreseeing the End

With every possible opportunity, Imam Riḍā ('a) emphasized the fact that Ma'mūn had forced him into accepting the successorship by threatening him with death. In addition to this, he would tell people that Ma'mūn intended on breaking his pledge. The Imam ('a) also explicitly proclaimed that he would eventually be poisoned by Ma'mūn. It has been narrated that he would mention this matter in front of Ma'mūn personally. Imam Riḍā's actions during his successorship also showed his evident dissatisfaction in the matter as a whole. All of this ran counter to the results that Ma'mūn sought when he had first devised this plan.

The Sixth Element: The Rightful Owners

The Imam ('a) would also remind others that the reality of the situation was that Ma'mūn had not done him a favor in making him his successor. The caliphate in reality belonged to him and his family, and it had been usurped by Ma'mūn and his predecessors. The Imam ('a) was constantly reminding the people of the illegitimacy of Ma'mūn's caliphate in this manner.

The Seventh Element: Refusal to be Associated with the State

After ultimately accepting the successorship, Imam Riḍā ('a) applied certain stipulations to his acceptance. He mentioned that he would never appoint anyone to a position, nor depose them. He would not draw up laws, or change anything about the prevailing situation; on the contrary, he stipulated that he would be a distant advisor in the affairs of

the government.

Ma'mūn, in turn, accepted these stipulations. Thus, Imam Riḍā ('a) neutralized many of the plans which Ma'mūn wished to implement. Through such stipulations, the Imam ('a) gave clear expression to the following points:

- A- A rejection of the legitimacy of Ma'mūn's government.
- B- Clearly showing that the prevailing system would never accept the Imam's views as its official policy and position.
- C- Placing Ma'mūn in a position where he was no longer able to do things in the name of the Imam ('a).
- D- Showing that the Imam ('a) was by no means ready to enact the policies of the government.¹¹⁶

The Special Social Circumstances during the 'Abbāsīd Era

Although Islam did not spread past the borders of the Hijāz region during the lifetime of the Prophet (ṣ), yet, due to its firm foundations, it quickly spread to all corners of the civilized world after his passing. The great empires of Rome Iran, Egypt, Yemen, Chaldea, and Assyria, which were located to the North, East, West, and South of the Hijāz, respectively, were all affected greatly by the spread of Islam. Over time, many of their people became Muslim.

In addition to this, the Islamic respect for knowledge caused the Islamic territories to absorb the scientific, political, and theological knowledge of various civilizations. Many books from these countries (from Greece and Egypt all the way to India) were translated into the Arabic language, which became the lingua franca of the new multi-national Muslim world. The scholars of Islam, who had taken their knowledge from the radiant light of the Quran, began to research and critique these new sciences and fields of knowledge. They continuously expanded these fields, and

¹¹⁶ Murtaḍā al-Husaynī, Sayyid Ja'far, *The Political Life of the Eighth Imam*, translated by Sayyid Khalil Khalilian, Fourth Edition, Tehran, The Office of Islamic Cultural Publications, 1365 Hijrī Shamshī, p. 168-183. Summarized and with slight differences in word usage.

interpreted them through the lens of their own Islamic worldview.

The translation of foreign scholarly works began in the time of the Umayyids (who were themselves strangers both to Islam and the sciences) and reached its peak during the era of the 'Abbāsids. Under the Abbasids, the rule of Hārūn and Ma'mūn can be considered as a high point with respect to the sciences and the spread of knowledge. This was also the time period when the Muslim world had reached its peak in terms of land mass. Of course, this cultural ascension was not something which was initiated by the 'Abbāsids or Umayyids; rather, this was the direct result of Islamic teachings and the Islamic inclination towards learning and knowledge. These teachings encouraged the Muslims to pursue knowledge no matter the cost, even if it meant going to far-off regions of the world.

In the books of history, it has been narrated that one night, Ma'mūn had a dream involving Aristotle, the famous Greek philosopher. In this dream, Ma'mūn saw himself asking Aristotle a question. When he woke up, he began to think about translating the works of Aristotle. He therefore wrote a letter to the emperor of Rome, and requested that a collection of ancient books on the sciences be sent to him. The emperor of Rome, after consulting with many people, accepted this request. Ma'mūn then commissioned some scholars, such as Ḥajjāj ibn Mathar, Ibn Baṭrīq, and Salmā (the director of Bayt al-Ḥikmah, an extremely large and famous library in Baghdad), to be in charge of this important project. This group reviewed the material from Rome and they sent the material that they considered to be worth translating to Ma'mūn. Ma'mūn then gave the order for the translation of these works.¹¹⁷

It is without doubt that the dreams of seasoned politicians such as Ma'mūn are never simple in nature, and they almost

¹¹⁷ Ibn Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, Cairo, al-Maktabah Tijāriyat al-Kubrā, p. 353.

always involve political and social considerations. Such "dreams" most probably served to strengthen the foundations of their oppressive governments. This program of action by Ma'mūn could have had any number of potential political motivations:

1- Ma'mūn, in order to be portrayed as a pious supporter of knowledge and learning, did this in order to gain popularity and esteem.

2- He wished to create a means of diversion for the people, in the face of various social problems and the bleak political outlook which was imposed over them.

3- His goal was to absorb the intellectual power of the scholars towards himself, and as a result, strengthen the foundations of his government.

4- He wished to create an intellectual powerhouse with which to compete with and counterbalance the family of the Prophet. This was because the family of the Prophet were renowned for their knowledge, and had many followers and admirers. It is possible that Ma'mūn wanted to absorb some of these followers into his own 'intellectual camp', thereby decreasing the followers of the family of the Prophet.

5- He wished to prove that the political system of the 'Abbāsids was worthy of ruling over the nation, similar to the great empires of Rome, Persia (Iran), and Egypt.

Of course, there are no natural contradictions between these five possibilities and it is possible that they were all considered by Ma'mūn. In any case, there is no doubt that he was instrumental in the translation of Greek texts and allocated a great deal of resources towards these projects. It is said that he sometimes gave the weight of the books in gold to those who had translated them. It is also said that whichever book was translated in his name, he would place a mark within it, and encourage the people reading and learning that specific science in various ways. He would also hold private sessions with various wise and learned individuals and he would take great joy in spending time with

them.¹¹⁸ In this fashion, various foreign sciences were propagated alongside the traditional Islamic sciences, and expertise in these fields became highly sought after in the society. Many of the notables in the society followed in Ma'mūn's footsteps and began to honor scholars who were learned in logic, philosophy, and other sciences. As a result, a large group of translators from Iraq, Syria, and Persia immigrated to Baghdad to translate these texts.¹¹⁹

Jurji Zaydan, the famous Christian historian, has written the following on this matter: "Hārūn al-Rashīd (who ruled from 170-193 Hijrī) reached the caliphate at a time when scholars and physicians from India, Iran, and Greece had come to Baghdad, and by means of their arrival, their ideas had given maturity to the opinions of the people and raised public awareness of various sciences and ancient historical books. Non-Muslim scholars, who had learned the Arabic language and who socialized with Muslims, encouraged them to learn these ancient sciences. In spite of this, the Muslims had trepidations about learning these foreign sciences (with the exception of medicine), because they believed that these foreign sciences conflicted with Islam.

In spite of this, because various (foreign) physicians gained nearness and favor with the caliphs, and because they were predominantly inclined towards sciences such as logic and philosophy, over time, the caliphs were introduced to these topics. Gradually, the caliphs became familiar with logic and philosophy and began to favor them as a science. In fact, whenever they would conquer a region, they would not burn their books but rather order that the books be brought to Baghdad, translated into Arabic, and studied. One example of this is found in Hārūn's conquest of Ankara, Umurīa, as well as other cities of Rome. After their conquest,

¹¹⁸ Jurji Zaydān, *The History of the Islamic Civilization*, translated by: 'Alī Jawāhir Kalām, Tehran, Mu'assasah Maṭbū'āti Amīr Kabīr, 1336 Hijrī Shamshī, vol. 3, p. 216.

¹¹⁹ The Second Congress of the Collection of The Works of Imam Ridā (a), 1366 Hijrī Shamshī, An article by Ayatollah Nāṣir Makārim Shirāzī, vol. 1, p. 428-432. With slight summarization and change in words.

Hārūn gained access to many books, and he had them collected and sent to Baghdad. He then ordered his personal physician Yūḥanā ibn Māsawīyah to translate them into Arabic. These books were all about Greek medicine and did not contain any material on logic or philosophy."

Under Hārūn, the book *Ūqlidis* was translated into Arabic for the first time by Ḥajjāj ibn Mathar. This first translation was named the *Hārūnīya*, and when the book was translated for a second time, it was called the *Ma'mūnīya*. Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd Barmakī (during the time of Hārūn) translated the book 'Majesty' for the first time into Arabic and a group of academics gave their commentary on it. However, since this group was unable to complete the commentary with the necessary level of expertise, Hārūn ordered Abū Ḥasān and Salmā (the head of the Bayt al-Ḥikmah library) to do the commentary and they edited and commented on the book in detail.

Ma'mūn and the Sciences of Philosophy and Logic

Various books of philosophy were translated during Ma'mūn's time, and this was primarily due to Ma'mūn's own personal interest in the subject. From the very beginning of Islam, the Muslims were accustomed to freedom of thought and freedom of speech. If a political or social matter came to the mind of any Muslim, he would unflinchingly express it to the governor or caliph of his time, and the presence of the rulers did not restrain them from this matter. This same atmosphere prevailed in religious matters as well; if someone understood a matter from a verse in the Quran or from a tradition of the Prophet (ṣ), and this was in opposition to the opinion of others, they would feel free to engage those individuals in open debate and discussion.

One consequence of this freedom of thought and belief was that it caused a myriad of sects to come about. When the era of the Companions (of the Prophet (ṣ)) came to an end and the second century Hijrī began, various sects began to

appear within the Islamic world. One of these sects was called the Mu'tazilah. The Mu'tazilah were a large group in the Muslim world that believed in the absolute concordance of the human intellect with religion, and vice versa. If their beliefs are studied carefully, it is clear that many of their views are on par with some of the most rigorous religious critiques in the modern world.

Ma'mūn and the Mu'tazilah

The Mu'tazilah, as a sect, was formed at the end of the first century Hijrī. Since the foundation of their beliefs was logic and justice, they gained many followers in a short period of time. In the field of fiqh, the caliph Manṣūr 'Abbāsī agreed with the followers of a concept known as Qiyās (analogy), and therefore supported Abū Ḥanīfa. This precedent was followed by the rest of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs. Coincidentally, the Mu'tazilah sect had much common ground with the followers of Qiyās. The former strived to prove their beliefs strictly through logic and reason, and to these ends, they engaged anyone whom they saw as being conversant with Aristotelian logic, and sought assistance from them in proving their points. Due to the prevalence of atheism which persisted during the caliphate of Maḥdī, this ideology of following logic and logic alone, became more widespread.

The Barāmkīh sect were also adherents of Qiyās, and naturally had a strong inclination towards knowledge and learning. As such, they engaged in translating various scholarly texts before Ma'mūn's time and they also organized gatherings for debate and discussion in their homes. It seems that Hārūn was not in agreement with this and therefore, out of fear, the Barāmkīh did not openly engage in these actions and kept their activities hidden.

As soon as Ma'mūn reached the caliphate (he ruled from 198 to 218 Hijrī), the situation began to change. Ma'mūn was a very intelligent and learned individual, with a strong

inclination towards Qīyās¹²⁰. He had studied many of the ancient books which had been translated in the past, and due to his inclination towards Qīyās, he accepted the Mu'tazilah sect and brought many of their notable figures close to himself (such as Abī al-Hadhīl 'Allāf, Ibrāhīm ibn Sayyār, and others). He also engaged in debates and discussions with the scholars of theology. Through it all, he remained a steadfast believer in the Mu'tazilah sect, and aided its followers and scholars. As a result of Ma'mūn's support, certain things which were ordinarily considered impossible to express publicly (out of fear of the rest of the scholars in the society) were now openly said in the public sphere; one of these issues was the notion of the createdness of the Quran, which was one of the claims of the Mu'tazilah.

Coincidentally, Ma'mūn, before reaching the position of the caliphate, was a believer in the notion that the Quran was created. Many from among the Muslims feared that Ma'mūn would become the caliph and end up spreading this belief. This fear reached the point that Fuḍayl ibn Ayyadh would openly say: "I ask God to prolong the life of Hārūn so that he can be safe from the evil of Ma'mūn's caliphate."

In spite of such fears, Ma'mūn reached the caliphate and began his support of the Mu'tazilah sect. When the scholarly class saw this, they raised their voices in protest, and since the majority of the Muslims were against the Mu'tazilah, this caused many problems for Ma'mūn. Ma'mūn, who was not able to backtrack on this issue, engaged the people through the medium of debate and discussion. He held many intellectual gatherings where this issue was discussed, and ordered that books of philosophy and logic be translated from Greek to Arabic as soon as possible; he would then study these translations personally.

Although his own opinion was strengthened through his studies and the various debates and discussions that were

¹²⁰ Analogy used in religious matters

held, the masses were not so much affected in this regard. When Ma'mūn realized this, he lost hope that the people would accept the Mu'tazilah and toward the end of his caliphate, he acted very harshly against the opponents of this group. When he left the city of Baghdad, he ordered Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm (the governor of Baghdad) to test the judges and scholars. If anyone from among these individuals believed in the "createdness" of the Quran, they were to be left alone, and those who did not have this opinion should be educated in regards to it.¹²¹

In addition, it seems that Ma'mūn had no fear with respect to translating various Greek texts into Arabic, due to an atmosphere where knowledge of all types had become prevalent in the society. The society had become such where it was very conducive to freedom of thought, freedom of belief, and an inclination towards analogy and logical deduction. In order to corroborate the beliefs of the Mu'tazilah, Ma'mūn began commissioning the translation of books of logic and philosophy. Then he initiated the translation of the books of Aristotle (both philosophy books, as well as other texts). In this manner, the translation of these texts began in earnest during the beginning of the third century Hijrī. The Mu'tazilah, much like thirsty men after water, began to study the philosophy of Aristotle, and engaged in exhaustive research. As a result, they gained a great deal of new intellectual ammunition to use against those who opposed their beliefs.¹²²

Translating Scientific Texts from Other Languages

Doctor Ibrāhīm Ḥasan has written the following on this subject: "The translation of foreign texts into the Arabic

¹²¹ We have mentioned the troubles which came about in regards to the 'createdness' of the Quran in some detail in the chapter on the life of Imam Hādī (a).

¹²² Jurji Zaydan, *The History of the Islamic Civilization*, translated by: 'Alī Jawāhir Kalām, Tehran, Mu'assasah Maṭbū'ātī Amīr Kabīr, 1336 Hijrī Shamshī, vol. 3, p. 212-215.

language was not prevalent under the Umayyids. Khālid ibn Yazīd ibn Mū'āwīya was the first individual who initiated the translation of books of medicine and chemistry into the Arabic language. Khālid summoned a group of Greek natives who were living in Egypt at that time, and requested that they translate a large number of Greek and Egyptian texts on the subject of applied chemistry, into Arabic. Khālid labored in this path because he wished to discover the method of making synthetic gold. During the era of 'Abd al-Malik Marwān, the government registers— which had all been in Farsi and Greek up to that point— were changed back into Arabic. In addition to this, the complete poetical works of Egypt, which had been in Egyptian and Greek, were also translated into Arabic."

When the 'Abbāsids took the reins of power, they were somewhat inclined towards the Iranians, and therefore, there was much fusion between the Arabs and the Iranians in the capital city. Furthermore, the caliphs showed much interest in the Greek and Iranian sciences. Maṣṣūr ordered that some foreign books be translated. Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq translated some of the books of Socrates and Galen into Arabic for Maṣṣūr. Ibn Muqaffa' translated Kulīlah into Arabic, as well as the book of Euclides. In addition to Ibn Muqaffa', many other scholars became renowned in translating texts into Farsi, such as the family of Nūbakhtīyān, Ḥasan ibn Sahl (the vizier of Ma'mūn), Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā Balādhūrī (the compiler of Futūh al-Baldān), and 'Amr ibn Farkhān.

Under Hārūn, the translations picked up pace and became more commonplace. Hārūn gained possession of various books from the large cities of Rome and he ordered that all available books from Greece be translated. The encouragement of the Barmakīs in the field of translation and the expensive gifts which were given to the translators were very effective in increasing the quality and quantity of translators. Even Ma'mūn would personally translate texts; he was especially fond of Greek and Farsi texts. He had people

sent to the city of Constantinople in order that they could bring back rare books on philosophy, geometry, music, and medicine. Ibn Nadīm has mentioned: "There was an exchange of letters between Ma'mūn and the Emperor of Rome, and Ma'mūn asked that various ancient scientific texts, which were held in the Roman treasury, be sent to him. After initially refusing, the emperor ended up accepting the request."

Ma'mūn then sent Ḥajjāj ibn Mathar, Ibn Baṭrīq, and Salmā (the head of the Dār al-Ḥikmah library) to Rome, so that they could bring back whichever of the books they wanted. When they brought Ma'mūn the books, he ordered that they be translated into Arabic. Qasṭā ibn Lūqā supervised over the Greek, Syriac, and Chaldean translations, while Yaḥyā ibn Hārūn managed the Farsi translations. The encouragement in these translations did not only come from Ma'mūn; it is said that "the people follow in the ways of the kings," and so, many of the books were translated into Arabic through the efforts of the wealthy in the society. For example, Muḥammad, Aḥmad, and Ḥasan, who were the followers of Shākīr (a well-known astronomer of that time), spent a great deal of money obtaining books in the field of mathematics, and they also had a vast library collection of geometry, music, and astronomy texts. They also sent Ḥusayn ibn Ishāq to Rome so that he could bring back rare and precious books which were found there.

Under Ma'mūn, many great mathematicians came to the forefront and Muḥammad ibn Mūsā Khawārizmī was one such individual. He was the first person to do organized research on the topic of algebra and thus established it as a separate science from arithmetic. The prevalence of translations, naturally caused many Muslims to begin discussing and researching the newfound sciences. They also began to add footnotes to the texts and corrected any errors which they found in them.

In this field, the name of Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq Kindī cannot

go unmentioned; he was an individual with mastery in the fields of medicine, philosophy, mathematics, logic, geometry, and astronomy. In his compilations, he followed the methods of Aristotle, and he also translated a great number of books on philosophy while correcting the errors within them.

Besides him, three other individuals were also very famous in this field: Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, Thābit ibn Qarrah' Ḥarānī, and 'Amr ibn Farkhān Ṭabarī. The 'Abbāsids translated all the works that they could find in Greek and Farsi. These included subjects such as: philosophy, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, music, geography, logic, astrology, maxims, and travels. Ibn Nadīm has mentioned that: "The children of Shākir Munjam gave approximately 500 dinars each month to the translators, which included Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, Thābit ibn Qarrah' Ḥarānī, and Jaysh ibn Ḥasan."

By contrast, under the Umayyids, libraries were not given much importance. Yet during the 'Abbāsīd era, in addition to translations beginning in earnest, the papermaking industry also progressed. They also had centers where literar figures and scholars would gather. As a result of th movement, many great libraries were established in which large number of religious and scientific texts were kept. Later, these libraries became the most renowned cultural centers of the Islamic world.

Dār al-Ḥikmah, which was most probably founded by Hārūn and was later headed by Ma'mūn, was the largest library of the 'Abbāsīd era and it remained in existence until the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols. This great library contained books on all the sciences which were prevalent during that time. The scholars who studied at the library would often end up extremely influential in their respective fields, and through them, religious and scientific knowledge became prevalent amongst the masses, both in the Muslim nation and beyond.

The spreading of knowledge was not only the domain of

the caliph; even viziers and other government officials began to support such causes. Mas'ūdī has written: "Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd Barmakī was much inclined towards intellectual debate and discussion, and he held gatherings during which Islamic theologians, as well as people from other nations, would assemble and engage in debate."¹²³

Imam Ridā's Role against a Wave of Un-Islamic Thought

As a result of these far reaching intellectual activities, there was one factor which was a cause for alarm, and this was that in the midst of these translators, there were individuals who were zealous and stubborn practitioners of other religions, including Zoroastrians, Sabeans, Nestorians, Roman Catholics, and Indian Brahmins. These individuals were engaged in translating Greek, Farsi, Syriac, Indian, Latin, as well as other texts into the Arabic language.

Certainly, not all of the individuals engaged in these works possessed purity of intention, and a group from amongst them tried their best to project various un-Islamic ideas and concepts into the Muslim domain. As expected, certain superstitious, deviant, and un-Islamic concepts were transmitted to the people through these translated works. These concepts quickly began to influence elements of the Muslim society.¹²⁴

¹²³ Doctor Ibrāhīm Ḥasan, Ḥasan, *The Political History of Islam*, translated by Abū al-Qāsim Pāyandīh, Fourth Edition, Tehran, Everlasting (Jāvidān) Publications, 1360 Hijrī Shamshī, vol. 2, p. 296-299.

¹²⁴ Doctor Ṭahā Ḥusayn, the famous Egyptian intellectual, has written on the effect that contact with foreign cultures had on the Muslims. He has written: "It was not long before the Muslims became familiar with various foreign cultures, and in particular with the culture of Greece and its philosophy. All of these had an effect on the Muslims, and they soon considered philosophy as a method of defending their religion. Then they went further and considered the defective human intellect as having preeminence over all matters, and thought that the intellect was the ultimate source of knowledge. Gradually, as a result of this, they felt themselves needless of the divine source of revelation. This excessive faith in the human intellect deceived them and left them bereft of the truth; it was this very mistake that caused them to cling to various logical deductions and caused them to split into more than 70 different sects." (*The Religion of Islam*, translated by Doctor Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Āyātī, Tehran, The Publication Company, 1339 Hijrī Shamshī, p. 266).

In addition, there was no powerful intellectual supervisory council in the 'Abbāsid government of that time. There was no group created to overlook the works being translated and carefully check the material that was being released into the public domain. If such a council had been in existence, they could have carefully sifted through the material and only allowed certain works (or sections of works) which were in line with Islamic thought to be propagated in society.

It goes without saying that these cultural and intellectual changes placed a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of Imam Riḍā ('a). The Imam ('a) deeply understood the dangerous situation of the society and he began acting in a manner that created nothing short of an intellectual revolution. Through this, he ended up protecting the Islamic society against a wave of un-Islamic thought which threatened it from every corner. The importance of this issue becomes even more apparent when we realize that the geographical boundaries of the Muslim nation had reached its outermost limits during the rule of Hārūn and Ma'mūn. The expanse of the nation was so large that some historians have written that there was never a larger government in recorded history up to that point. They have compared the breadth of the Islamic nation to that of the empire of Alexander the Great.

During that time period, the following countries or regions were considered part of the Muslim world: Iran, Afghanistan, The East Indies, Turkistan, the Caucasus, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Arabia, Sudan, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Spain (Andalusia). Therefore, if the Muslim nation was measured during the time of the 'Abbāsids without even considering Spain, it would be found that it was at least equal to the area of the entire European continent, and possibly even more than this.¹²⁵ It is natural that the

¹²⁵ Gustave Luboun has mentioned: "The truth of the matter is that the political sultanate of the Arabs reached its peak power during the time of Hārūn and his son

prevailing culture of these outlying nations would affect the Muslims, and these effects would eventually take root in the religious practices and belief system of the religion itself.

Ma'mūn's Primary Goal in Organizing Gatherings of Debate

Ma'mūn, after imposing the acceptance of the successorship on Imam Riḍā ('a), began to organize widespread sessions of debate and discussion. He invited the distinguished intellectuals of that time, both Muslim and non-Muslim, to these grand gatherings of debate. Without doubt, the overt reason behind these sessions was the establishment of Imam Riḍā's ('a) high rank and position in various fields and sciences, both religious and otherwise. In spite of this overt reason, there was also a more hidden reason which has been mentioned by the researchers, some of which are listed below:

1- One group sees these gatherings of debate and discussion in a negative light because the actions of tyrants have always been based on self-benefit and the consolidation of power. This group states that Ma'mūn's primary reason behind this was to bring down the rank and position of the Imam ('a) in the eyes of the masses. Moreover, they have mentioned that Ma'mūn wished to lower the Imam's rank in the eyes of the Iranians in particular, who were very attached to the family of the Prophet. Ma'mūn assumed that the Imam ('a) was only learned in simple matters of the Quran and the traditions, and was unlearned in other intellectual fields.

This group of researchers, in order to prove their claims, have referenced Ma'mūn's own words, which have been recorded in the books of history. In a tradition from Nawfalī, the close companion of Imam Riḍā ('a), it is mentioned that:

Ma'mūn. The eastern limits of their empire reached China; in Africa, the Arabs had driven out the uncivilized tribes to the borders of Ethiopia and they had driven the Romans to the Bosphorus strait and the Atlantic Ocean..." (The History of The Islamic and Arab Civilization, translated by Sayyid Hāshim Ḥusaynī, The Islamic Library, p. 211).

"Sulaymān Marwazī, the famous theologian, went to Ma'mūn (in Khurāsān). Ma'mūn treated him with much respect and gave him many gifts. Then he said to him: 'My uncle's son, 'Alī ibn Mūsā, has come to me from the Ḥijāz, and he is fond of the science of theology (Aqā'id) and its scholars. If you are so inclined, come to us on the Day of Tarwiye (the 8th day of the month of Dhī al-Ḥijjah) and engage in debate and discussion with him.' It was possible that this specific day was selected so that a larger group of the scholars could be present at the gathering.

Sulaymān, who was very proud and arrogant of his knowledge, said: 'Oh Commander of the Faithful, I would prefer not to engage him with questions in front of the Hāshimīs, for perhaps he would not be able to answer and would be lowered in terms of his social position. I cannot pursue a discussion too deeply with the likes of him.' Ma'mūn replied: 'My goal in this matter is nothing but that you close the doors of escape for him, for I know that you are a man powerful in matters of knowledge and debate.' Sulaymān replied: 'Now that it is so, there is no problem; invite us both to a gathering so that in this way, there will be no blame placed on me.'"¹²⁶ This debate was organized as promised, and Imam Riḍā ('a) debated with Sulaymān in such a way that he was left unable to answer in front of the entire audience.

Another piece of evidence which corroborates this theory is a tradition narrated from Imam Riḍā ('a) himself. At the time that Ma'mūn had organized the debate sessions, Ma'mūn would personally sit opposite to the opponents of the family of the Prophet and debate with them. He would speak about the superiority of the imamate of Imam 'Alī ('a) over the rest of the companions; through such means, he

¹²⁶ Ṣadūq, 'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā (a), First Edition, Beirut, Mu'assasah' Al-'Alamī Lil Maṭbū'āt, 1404 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 179.

- Majlisī, Biḥār al-Anwār, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1395 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 49, p. 177.

would attempt to gain nearness to Imam Riḍā ('a). The Imam ('a) mentioned the following to a group of his trusted companions, saying: "Do not be fooled by his words. I swear by God that no one will murder me but him, but I have no option but to be patient, until my life comes to an end."¹²⁷

Of course, it was to Ma'mūn's benefit to defend the right of Imam 'Alī ('a) since the original slogan of the 'Abbāsids was "Al-Riḍā Min 'Āli Muḥammad."¹²⁸ It was through the use of this slogan that they were able to establish their government in the first place. In addition to this, the backbone of the government was composed of Iranians who were inclined to the family of the Prophet, and there was no way to retain their support except through such slogans.

In any case, the explanation of the Imam ('a) in the tradition clearly shows that Ma'mūn was not sincere in organizing the debates. Abū al-Ṣalt, a liaison of the Imam ('a), has mentioned: "...Since the people are increasing in their love for the Imam ('a) on a daily basis, owing to his virtues and spiritual perfections, Ma'mūn decided to summon all the scholars of theology from the various corners of the Muslim world, in order that the Imam ('a) could be proven weak and incapable in debate. Through these means, his rank in the view of the scholars would be lowered and the common people would see his shortcomings and deficiencies. In spite of these plans, Imam Riḍā ('a) defeated all of his debate opponents, whether they were Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Brahmins, Sabeans, or Atheists..."¹²⁹

It is also interesting to note that while Ma'mūn was very much interested in these debates and discussions, after the Imam ('a) was martyred, such gatherings came to an abrupt end. Imam Riḍā ('a) was well aware of Ma'mūn's intentions and he would say: "Once I debate the people of the Torāh

¹²⁷ Ṣadūq, *Ibid*, vol. 2, p. 185.

- Majlisī, *Ibid*, p. 189.

¹²⁸ For the satisfaction of the Family of Muḥammad (ṣ).

¹²⁹ Ṣadūq, *Ibid*, vol. 2, p. 239.

- Majlisī, *Ibid*, p. 290.

with their Torāh, the people of the Injīl¹³⁰ with their Injīl, the people of the Zabūr with their Zabūr, the star worshippers in Hebraic, the Zoroastrians through the method of their Parsī, the Romans with their own method, and the people of debate in their own language, and they all acknowledge (the truth of the matter), then Ma'mūn will understand that he has chosen a wrong method (in overcoming me), and he will deeply regret it."¹³¹

Therefore, it is understandable that many look at the seemingly pro-intellectual policies of Ma'mūn in a cynical light.

2- If we were to leave aside this first potential intention of Ma'mūn, there is still a second possibility which would catch our attention, that being that perhaps Ma'mūn wished to define the Imam's ('a) status as limited to intellectual circles, and thus gradually separate him from political matters. Through this method, he wished to show that the Imam ('a) is a man of learning and a sanctuary for the nation in academic matters, but that he does not have anything to do with politics. As a result of this, Ma'mūn would gradually raise a slogan of the separation between politics (in essence his rule) and religion (the Imam's position).

3- Skillful political players always wish to keep the people busy and occupied through different means. Through these means, the masses will be diverted from the essential matters of society and the deficiencies of the ruling establishment. It is possible that Ma'mūn organized these intellectual meetings so that the people who were captivated and inclined towards the Imam ('a) would attend and later speak about the Imam's ('a) victory, leaving Ma'mūn free in his political intrigues to do whatever he wished.

4- The fourth possibility is that Ma'mūn was not lacking in

¹³⁰ What is known today as the New Testament.

¹³¹ Majlisī, Ibid, p. 175.

- al-Shaykh Azizullah al-'Āṭarī al-Khabūshānī, Masnad al-Imām Riḍā (a), al-Mu'tamar al-'Ālāmī Lil Imām Riḍā, 1406 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 2, p. 75.

personal merit and thus he wished to be introduced to the Muslim society as a knowledgeable scholar. Presenting himself as a lover of knowledge and learning was favorable for his government and it had the potential to attract many individuals towards himself.

If we consider that these gatherings of debate and discussion possessed a definite political angle, and that furthermore, political matters are usually not driven by a single cause, then it is a strong possibility that Ma'mūn considered all four of these points.

In any case, extensive organized gatherings of debate and discussion were set up by Ma'mūn. Yet, contrary to what Ma'mūn had initially expected, he ended up not achieving what he had intended, and in fact, he was left in the opposite situation. To illustrate this issue better, let us examine a few examples of the debates which the Imam ('a) participated in. It is unfortunate to note that these debates and discussions have not been fully recorded in the books of history and only short summaries have been preserved.

The Debates of the Imam with the Followers of Other Religions and Sects

While the debates of Imam Riḍā ('a) were numerous, the most important ones are listed below. These debates have been narrated by the late Shaykh Ṣadūq, in his book 'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā. The late 'Allāmah Majlisī has also narrated from the book 'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā in his forty ninth volume of Biḥār al-Anwār, as well as in the book Masnad al-Imām Riḍā, in its second volume. These debates are as follows:

1- The debate with Jathlīq¹³²

¹³² Jathlīq (minus the ة and the ل) is a Greek name which refers to the head of the Arch Bishops. It is a title which was given to the great Christian scholars and it is not a specific individual's name (al-Mūnjid). It is possible that it was the 'Arabicized term for the Catholics.

- 2- The debate with the Ra's Jālūt¹³³
- 3- The debate with Harbuz Akbar¹³⁴
- 4- The debate with 'Umrān Šābī¹³⁵

These four debates took place in one gathering where Ma'mūn and a group of the scholars and notables of Khurāsān were all present.

- 5- The debate with Sulaymān Marwazī¹³⁶ (which came about spontaneously in a gathering in the presence of Ma'mūn and his officials)

- 6- The debate with 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Jahm¹³⁷

7- The debate with the leaders of various religions in Baṣrah

Each one of these debates contains deep points of wisdom. Although 1,200 years have passed since these debates were held, one finds that they do not fail to educate and inspire. This is true from both the perspective of their content, as well as the technique and style of engagement which the Imam ('a) utilized.

As an example, let us look at the debate with Jathlīq, which took place in one of the large gatherings of Ma'mūn.

The Efforts of Ma'mūn

In the book 'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā, the following has been narrated that: "When 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā ('a) entered

¹³³ 'Ra's Jālūt' was a term for the scholars and notable individuals from the Jewish faith. This was also not a specific individual's name.

¹³⁴ Harbuz Akbar, or Hīrbad Akbar, was a title given to the leader of the Zoroastrians. It meant the 'great religious leader, Zoroastrian judge, and servant of the fire temple'.

¹³⁵ 'Umrān Šābī, as is apparent from his name, was defending the religion of the Sabeans. The Sabeans are a group who consider themselves the followers of Yaḥyā. They are divided into 2 subgroups, one of whom are monotheists and the other, polytheists. One group began engaging in star worship and are sometimes colloquially called star-worshippers. Their main center was previously the city of Ḥarān in Iraq, and then they moved to other areas in Iraq and southern Iran. In accordance with their beliefs, they are most often found living next to large rivers. To this day, they can be found in Ahwāz and other areas in the region.

¹³⁶ Sulaymān Marwazī was the most famous scholar of theology in Khurāsān during the time of Ma'mūn. Ma'mūn would show him a great deal of respect and reverence.

¹³⁷ 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Jahm was a Nasibī and an enemy of the Ahl al-Bayt. (Šadūq, 'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā, First Edition, Tehran, Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyah, 1377 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 204).

Ma'mūn's court, Ma'mūn ordered Faḍl ibn Sahl (his high ranking vizier) to gather the heads of the various religions. These included: Jathlīq (the great leader of the Christians), Ra's al-Jālūt (the great leader of the Jews), the heads of the Sabeans, Harbuz Akbar (the leader of the Zoroastrians), Niṣṭās Rūmī (the great scholar of the Christians), as well as other scholars of theology. They were all invited in order to discuss various issues with Imam Riḍā ('a) and also in order that Imam Riḍā ('a) could hear of their beliefs.

Faḍl ibn Sahl invited all of these individuals, and when they had gathered, he came to Ma'mūn and announced: 'They are ready.' Ma'mūn replied: 'Have them enter.' After they entered, he greeted them and thanked them for coming. Then he said: 'I have invited all of you here for a worthy cause, and I would like if you would debate with the son of my uncle who is from Medina and has just arrived. Tomorrow, all of you should assemble here and none should be absent.' They all replied: 'Yes, we will all obey and we shall be here tomorrow.'

Hasan ibn Sahl Nawfalī has narrated: We were in the presence of Imam 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā ('a), busy speaking with him, when suddenly, Yāsir, who was in charge of Imam Riḍā's ('a) affairs, entered and said to the Imam ('a)—Ma'mūn has sent you his greetings and says: 'May your brother be at your service. The leaders and scholars of various religions have all gathered; if you like, accept this inconvenience and come to the gathering tomorrow and listen to their words. And if you prefer not to come, then I will not insist. Moreover, if you like, we will come to you, for this not difficult for us.'

Imam Riḍā ('a), in a short yet meaningful line, said: 'Send him my greetings and tell him that I know what he wants; God willing, I will come tomorrow.'¹³⁸ Nawfalī, who was one of the companions of Imam Riḍā ('a) says: When Yāsir left

¹³⁸ Ṣadūq, 'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā, First Edition, Tehran, Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyah, 1377 Hijri Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 155.

the gathering of the Imam ('a), the Imam ('a) looked at me and said: 'You are from Iraq and the people of Iraq are subtle and intelligent; what do you think about this matter? What is Ma'mūn's plan in assembling polytheists and the scholars of various religions?' I replied that he wants to test you and gauge the extent of your knowledge. His actions are based on a weak foundation; I swear by God that he has devised a bad plan...' The Imam ('a) replied: '...and what has he planned?

Nawfalī, who perhaps was not yet fully aware of the breadth of the Imam's knowledge and feared Ma'mūn's plot, replied: 'The scholars of the science of theology are known for their deviations and their opposition to the scholars of Islam. This is because a scholar does not deny the truth, whereas these people are known for their denial and sophistry. If someone introduces a statement that God is one, they will not accept this statement, and if someone says that Muḥammad (ṣ) was the Prophet of God, they will ask you to show proof for his prophethood. They are a dangerous group of individuals and... they use sophistry against people to such an extent that the people recant what they have said and change their views based on their arguments. May I be sacrificed for you, beware of these people.'

The Imam ('a) smiled and said: 'Oh Nawfalī, are you afraid that they will invalidate my arguments and close the way of debate for me?' Nawfalī, who had become regretful of what he had said, replied: 'No, I swear by God that I do not fear for you; I am hopeful that God will make you victorious over them.' Imam Riḍā ('a) then said: 'Oh Nawfalī, would you like to know if Ma'mūn will regret this?' Nawfalī replied in the affirmative.

Imam Riḍā ('a) said: 'When he hears my reasoning against the people of the Torāh through their Torāh, and against the people of the Injīl through their Injīl, and against the People of the Zabūr through their Zabūr, and against the Sabaeans through their Hebrew language, and against the Zoroastrians in their Farsi language, and against the Romans through their

Roman language, and against the followers of various religions through their own languages... Indeed, when I have nullified the arguments of each group separately, in a manner that they leave their religion and accept my words, then Ma'mūn will know that he is not worthy of his position. When this happens, he will become regretful and there is no action or power but through God, the most High.'

Nawfalī later mentions: When it was morning, Faḍl ibn Sahl came to the Imam ('a) and said: 'May I be sacrificed for you, your cousin (Ma'mūn) is waiting for you and the group has assembled; what is your opinion on this matter?' Imam Riḍā ('a) said: 'You go ahead; I will come, God willing.' Then he performed the Wudhū and drank some Sawīqī¹³⁹; he gave us some to drink and we also drank. Then we left alongside the Imam ('a) and entered Ma'mūn's gathering.

The gathering was full of renowned individuals. Muḥammad ibn Ja'far,¹⁴⁰ along with a group from the Hāshimīs and the descendants of Abū Ṭālib, as well as a group of the army commanders were all present. When Imam Riḍā ('a) entered, Ma'mūn stood up; Muḥammad ibn Ja'far and all of the Hāshimīs also stood up. Imam Riḍā ('a) took a seat alongside Ma'mūn, but they, out of respect for the Imam ('a), continued to stand until the order to sit was given, after which they took their seats. For a time, Ma'mūn was busily engaged in speaking with the Imam ('a). Then, he turned towards Jathlīq and said: 'Oh Jathlīq, this is the son of my uncle, 'Alī ibn Mūsā ibn Ja'far ('a). He is of the descendants of Fāṭimah ('a), the daughter of our Prophet (ṣ), and 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib ('a). I would like that you debate with him, but do not forsake fairness in this debate.' Jathlīq said: 'Oh Commander of the Faithful, how can I debate with him, while he will argue using a book which I reject, and while he believes in a prophet which I do not have faith in.'

¹³⁹ Sawīqī was a special drink made with flour.

¹⁴⁰ The son of Imam Ṣādiq (a) and the uncle of Imam 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (a).

The Debate with Jathlīq

At this point, Imam Riḍā ('a) began to speak: 'Oh Christian, if I reason with you using your Injīl, will you accept?' Jathlīq replied: 'Is it possible for me to reject the words of the Injīl? Indeed, I swear by God that I will accept, however much it may be to my disadvantage.' Imam Riḍā ('a) then said: 'Ask whatever you wish and you will hear its answer.' Jathlīq then asked: 'What do you have to say about the prophethood of Jesus ('a) and his book? Do you reject anything with respect to these two?'

Imam Riḍā ('a) replied: 'I acknowledge the prophethood of Jesus ('a), his book, and what he has given tidings of to his nation and that which his disciples have acknowledged; I reject the prophethood of that Jesus who has not acknowledged the prophethood of Muḥammad (ṣ) and his book to his people.' Jathlīq said: 'At the time of rendering judgment, do you not use the testimony of two just individuals?' Imam Riḍā ('a) replied: 'Yes.' Jathlīq said: 'Then present two witnesses from the people who are not of your religion and whom the Christians do not reject their testimony in regards to the prophethood of Muḥammad (ṣ) likewise, ask us to bring two similar witnesses from people who are not from our religion to do the same.' Imam Riḍā ('a) replied: 'Oh Christian, you have now observed equity; will you accept an individual who was just and preferred by Christ, Jesus the son of Mary?' Jathlīq asked: 'Who is this just man, what his name?' Imam Riḍā ('a) said: 'What do you say in regards to Yuḥnāy Daylamī?' Jathlīq said: 'Most excellent, you have mentioned the most beloved man in the eyes of Christ.'

Imam Riḍā ('a) said: 'I ask you under oath whether the Injīl contains the following words of Yuḥnāy, where he says: Christ gave me the news of the religion of Muḥammad the Arab and gave me glad tidings that after him (after Jesus), such a prophet would come. I gave these glad tidings to the apostles and they professed faith in him.' Jathlīq said: 'Yes,

Yuhñāy has narrated these words from Christ and he has given the glad tidings of the prophethood of a man and his family and successor, but he has not mentioned during which time this will take place and he has not mentioned his name so that we can recognize him.'

Imam Riḍā ('a) said: 'If we bring forward a person who reads from the Injīl and recites verses from it, which mention the name of Muḥammad (ṣ), his family, and his nation, will you profess faith in it?' Jathlīq said: 'Indeed I will.' Imam Riḍā ('a) said to Nīṣṭās the Roman: 'Do you have the third book of the Injīl memorized?' Nīṣṭās replied: 'Yes, I have it memorized.' Then the Imam ('a) faced Ra's al-Jālūt (the great leader of the Jews) and said: 'Do you also read the Injīl?' He replied: 'Yes, I swear by my life (that i read it).' The Imam ('a) said to him: 'Then take the third book, if there was a mention of Muḥammad and his family, then witness in my favor, and if there was none, then do not bear witness.' Then Imam Riḍā ('a) began to recite the third book until he came to the name of the Prophet (ṣ); at this point he paused and turned towards Jathlīq, saying: 'Oh Christian, by the right of Christ and his mother, do you accept that I am aware of the Injīl.' Jathlīq replied in the affirmative.

The Imam ('a) then recited the name of the Prophet, his family, and his nation; he then said: 'Oh Christian, what do you say? Are these the words of Jesus, the son of Maryam? If you deny what the Injīl has said in this matter, then you have denied Moses and Jesus both, and you have become a disbeliever.' Jathlīq said: 'I do not deny that of which its existence in the Injīl has become clear to me and I acknowledge it.' The Imam ('a) then said: 'All of you witness that he has acknowledged this.' Then he said: 'Oh Jathlīq, ask any question that you wish.'

Jathlīq asked: 'Tell us how many apostles Jesus, the son of Mary, had, and also how many in number the scholars of the Injīl were?' Imam Riḍā ('a) said: 'You have asked from a person who knows. The Apostles were twelve in number and

the most knowledgeable and virtuous one from among them was Luke. The notable Christian scholars were three individuals: Yuḥnāy Akbar, from the land of Bakh, Yuḥnāy from Qarqīsā, and Yuḥnāy Daylamī from Rajāz; the name of the Prophet, his family, and his nation were with him and it was he who gave the glad tidings to the nation of Jesus and the Children of Israel.'

He then added: 'Oh Christian, I swear by God that we have faith in the Jesus ('a) who had faith in Muḥammad (ṣ), but the only fault that we have with your Prophet Jesus ('a) was that he would fast and pray little.' Jathlīq was astonished at this and said: 'I swear by God that you nullified your knowledge and made weak the foundations of your work. Here I thought that you were the most knowledgeable of the Muslims.' The Imam ('a) said: 'What is it that has happened (for you to think this)?' Jathlīq said: 'You say that Jesus ('a) was weak, and prayed and fasted but little, while Jesus ('a) did not break his fast even for one day, and there was no night that he would sleep; he was perpetually fasting and standing throughout the nights (in worship).' Imam Riḍā ('a) said: 'For whom would he pray and fast?' Jathlīq found himself unable to answer and became quiet (because if he acknowledged the worship of Jesus ('a), then this would not be in concordance with his divinity).

Imam Riḍā ('a) said: 'Oh Christian, I have another question for you.' Jathlīq, with humility, said: 'If I know the response, I will answer.' The Imam ('a) said: 'Do you reject that Jesus would raise the dead with the permission of God, the most High?' Jathlīq found himself at a dead end, and without having a choice, he said: 'I do deny it because that person who raised the dead, and cured those born blind and afflicted with leprosy was God himself and worthy of divinity.'

The Imam ('a) said: 'The Prophet 'Ilyas' would also do these things, and he would walk on water, raise the dead, and cure the blind and the lepers, yet his nation did not consider

him as a deity and thus no one worshipped him. The Prophet Jizqīl ('a) raised the dead and performed these miracles as well.'

Then the Imam ('a) turned towards Ra's al-Jālūt and said: 'Oh Ra's al-Jālūt, do you see in your Torāh that when Nebuchadnezzar brought the prisoners to Bābul, during the time that the government was fighting against Bayt al-Muqaddas, that God sent Hizqīl to them and he would raise their dead? This reality is preserved in the Torāh, and no one but the rejecters of truth deny it.' Ra's al-Jālūt replied: 'We have heard this and know it.' Imam Riḍā ('a) said: 'You speak the truth,' adding: 'Oh Jew, take this section from the Torāh.' Then he began to recite verses from the Torāh. The Jewish man was utterly amazed by this.

Then the Imam ('a) faced the Christian man and began to recount some of the miracles of the Prophet of Islam (ṣ), such as bringing the dead back to life and curing the ill who were seen as incurable. He said that while all of these were astonishing miracles, we would never consider the Prophet (ṣ) as being God. If, due to these miracles, you consider Jesus as being God, then you must also consider Ilyas' and Hizqīl as being God, for they also raised the dead. Similarly, Prophet Abraham ('a) once took some birds, killed them, and put their pieces onto various mountains; then he called them and they all came to life. Prophet Moses ('a) did something similar with 70 people who died after being struck by lightning in the mountain of Tūr. You can never deny these realities, for the Torāh, Injīl, Zabūr, and the Qurān have all spoken of them; therefore, you must consider all of these individuals as your God. Jathlīq was left without an answer; thus, he submitted and said: 'The word is yours, and there is no God but the one God.'

Then Imam Riḍā ('a) asked Jathlīq and Ra's al-Jālūt questions from the chapter of Isaiah. He replied: 'I am well informed about it.' The Imam ('a) said to him: 'Do you remember where Isaiah said: I saw an individual who was

riding a mule and wearing clothing of light (indicating Prophet Jesus ('a)) and I saw another individual who was riding on a camel and his light was like the light of the moon (indicating the Prophet of Islam (s)).' They replied: 'Indeed, Isaiah has said such words.'

Imam Riḍā ('a) then added: 'Oh Christian, do you remember these words of Christ in the Injīl when he said: I am going towards my Lord and your Lord, and Barqlītā will come and give a true testimony about me (the same way that I testified about him) and he will explain everything for you?'¹⁴¹ Jathlīq said: 'We acknowledge what you have said about the Injīl as being correct.'

Then Imam Riḍā ('a) spoke about the Injīl and how the first Injīl was lost and then later written individually by four people: Mark, Luke, Matthew, and John. Moreover, he mentioned some contradictions in the speech of Jathlīq. At this point, Jathlīq found himself in a state of helplessness where he could find no way of escape. When Imam Riḍā ('a) once again asked Jathlīq: 'Oh Jathlīq, ask whatever you wish.' Jathlīq refrained from asking any more questions and said: 'Let someone other than me ask a question, for I swear by the right of Christ, I did not think that there existed anyone like you amongst the Muslims.'¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ The meaning of Barqlītā or Farqlītā, whose coming was foretold by the Prophet Jesus (a), is Prophet Muḥammad (s). This foretelling is recorded in the bible of Yuḥannā, in the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters. The Holy Quran, in verse 6 of Surah Ṣaff, has mentioned the same matter by Jesus (a). (For further information, please refer to the book Aḥmad Maw'ūd Injīl, by Ja'far Subḥānī, Tawhid Publications, Qum, 1361 Hijrī Shamshī, p. 97-133).

¹⁴² The Second Congress of the Collection of The Works of Imam Riḍā (a), 1366 Hijrī Shamshī, article by Ayatollah Nāṣir Makārim Shīrāzī, vol. 1, p. 432-452. With slight summarization.

The Ninth Imam

Imam Muḥammad Jawād

A Brief Look at the Life of Imam Jawād

The Ninth Imam's name is Muḥammad, his agnomen Abū Ja'far, and his titles are Taqī and Jawād. He was born in the Holy Month of Ramaḍān, in the year 195 Hijrī, in the city of Medina.¹⁴³ His mother was named Sabīkah and was from the family of the wife (Māriya' Qubṭiyya) of the Prophet of Islam (ṣ).¹⁴⁴ She possessed a high ethical and moral rank, and was the best of the women of her time.¹⁴⁵ Her position was so high that Imam Riḍā ('a) would remember her as a woman of purity and virtue.¹⁴⁶ On the day that the father of Imam Jawād ('a) passed away, he was approximately 8 years old. He was martyred at the age of 25¹⁴⁷ and buried in the graveyard of the Quraysh in Baghdad, next to the grave of his grandfather, Imam Mūsā ibn Ja'far ('a).

Caliphs Who Lived during the Time of the Imam

The Ninth Imam's ('a) imamate coincided with the caliphate of two 'Abbāsīd caliphs, Ma'mūn (193-218) and Mu'taṣim (218-227). Both of these individuals forced Imam Jawād ('a) to leave Medina and take up residence in Baghdad this was in line with a political tactic initiated by Ma'mūr

¹⁴³ Kulaynī, *al-Usūl Min al-Kāfi*, Second Edition, Tehran, Maktabah Ṣadūq, 1381 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 492.

- Shaykh Mufid, *al-Irshād*, Qum, Maktabah Baṣīratī, p. 316.

Some have mentioned the birth of Imam Jawād (a) as having taken place in the middle of the month of Rajab of that same year. (Ṭabarsī, *'Ilām al-Warā Bi'ilām al-Hudā*, Third Edition, Tehran, Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Islāmiyya, p. 344)

¹⁴⁴ Kulaynī, *Ibid*, p. 315 and 492.

- Ibn Shahr Ashūb, *Manāqib Āli Abi Ṭālib*, Qum, Mu'assasat al-Intishārāt 'Alāmah, vol. 4, p. 379.

¹⁴⁵ Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt al-Wasiyya*, Najaf, Manshūrāt al-Maṭba'at al-Haydarīa, 1374 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 209.

¹⁴⁶ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiyya, 1395 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 50, p. 15.

¹⁴⁷ Kulaynī, *al-Usūl Min al-Kāfi*, Second Edition, Tehran, Maktabah Ṣadūq, 1381 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 492.

- Shaykh Mufid, *al-Irshād*, Qum, Maktabah Baṣīratī, p. 316.

with respect to Imam Riḍā ('a). There, in the capital of the Islamic world, Imam Jawād's activities were closely monitored by the caliph and his many agents.

A Blessed Birth

In the family of Imam Riḍā ('a) and in the gatherings of the Shia, the birth of Imam Jawād ('a) was commemorated as a particularly blessed and auspicious birth. Abū Yaḥyā Ṣan'ānī has mentioned that: "One day I was with Imam Riḍā ('a), when they brought his son Abū Ja'far, who was a child at that time. The Imam ('a) said: 'For our Shias, there has never been a more blessed birth than his birth.'"¹⁴⁸

It seems that the Imam ('a) would use various occasions as opportunities to mention his son to the people, and this became well-known among the Shias and companions of Imam Riḍā ('a). Two individuals from amongst the Shia—Ibn Asbāṭ and 'Abbād ibn Ismā'il—have mentioned: "We were in the presence of Imam Riḍā ('a), when they brought Abū Ja'far. We asked: 'Is this the blessed and auspicious son?' The Imam ('a) replied: 'Indeed, this is he, of whom no birth in Islam has equaled in blessing.'"¹⁴⁹

Again, Abū Yaḥyā Ṣan'ānī has mentioned: "In Mecca, I was honored to be able to see Imam Riḍā ('a). I saw the Imam ('a) peeling a banana and giving it to his son Abū Ja'far. I asked: 'Is this the same blessed and auspicious birth?' He said: 'Indeed, there has never been a more blessed birth in Islam and for our Shias than his birth.'"¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Shaykh Mufid, *al-Irshād*, Qum, Maktabah Baṣīratī, p. 319.

- Ṭabarsī, *'Ilām al-Warā Bi-'ilām al-Hudā*, Third Edition, Tehran, Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, p. 347.

- Fattāl Nayshābūrī, *Rawḍat al-Wā'izīn*, First Edition, Beirut, Mu'assasat al-'Alamī Lil Maṭbū'āt, 1406 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 261.

¹⁴⁹ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1395 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 50, p. 20.

¹⁵⁰ Kulaynī, *al-Usūl Min al-Kāfi*, Second Edition, Tehran, Maktabah Ṣadūq, 1381 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 361.

- Qazwīnī, Sayyid Kāzim, *al-Imām al-Jawād Min al-Mahd 'Il al-Laḥd*, Beirut, Mu'assasat Balāgh, 1408 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 337.

At first glance, perhaps people may think that the meaning of these traditions is that Imam Jawād's ('a) existence possessed more blessings than all of the preceding Imams ('a) for the Shia, but such an assumption cannot be accepted. By researching the specific situation and the historical context around the event, we can conclude that the meaning of this tradition was that the specific situation and context of Imam Jawād's ('a) birth is what resulted in special blessings for the Shia. The time period of Imam Riḍā ('a) was a unique one, and the Imam ('a) faced many issues during the time of his imamate which were without precedent in the times of the previous Imams ('a).

On the one hand, after the martyrdom of Imam Kāzīm ('a), there was a group known as the Wāqifiya, who rejected the imamate of Imam Riḍā ('a) based on certain worldly pretexts. On the other hand, Imam Riḍā ('a) did not have a child until he was 47 years of age. Since there were traditions from the Prophet (ṣ) stating that the Imams ('a) were twelve in number and that nine of them would come from the line of Imam Ḥusayn ('a), thus, the lack of a child brought both Imam Riḍā's ('a) own imamate, as well as the continuation of the imamate, under question. The Wāqifiya used this matter as a pretext for rejecting the imamate of Imam Riḍā ('a).

Testament to this can be found in the acknowledgment of Ḥusayn ibn Qīyāmā Wāsiṭī to the Eighth Imam ('a),¹⁵ as well as in the Imam's ('a) answer to him. Ibn Qīyāmā, one of the leaders of the Wāqifiya,¹⁶ wrote a letter to the Eighth Imam ('a) accusing him of being sterile, writing: "How is it possible that you are an Imam, while you do not have any children?" The Imam ('a) answered him with the following words: "How do you know that I will not come to have children— I swear by God that it will not be more than a few

¹⁵ Shaykh Mufid, *al-Irshād*, Qum, Maktabah Baṣīratī, p. 318.

- 'Alī ibn 'Isā al-'Irbilī, *Kashf al-Ghammah*, Tabriz, Maktabah Banī Hāshimī, 1381 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 3, p. 142.

- Tastarī, Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī, *Qāmūs al-Rijāl*, Tehran, The Center for Book Publications, vol. 3, p. 37.

days when God will grant me a son who will separate the truth from the falsehood.”¹⁵²

These attacks from the likes of Ḥusayn ibn Qiyāmā, as well as other followers of the Wāqifiya, were not limited to this one instance; they would use various occasions and events as opportunities to repeat their claims, and Imam Riḍā (‘a) was continuously refuting their words and arguments.¹⁵³ This continued, until the birth of Imam Jawād (‘a) put an end to their words, and the Shia were saved from a difficult situation and their position was further strengthened.¹⁵⁴

The suggestions of the Wāqifiya and the enemies of the Imams (‘a) had reached such a level, that even after the birth of Imam Jawād (‘a), another group from the family of Imam Riḍā (‘a), due to their jealousy, came forward to claim that Imam Jawād (‘a) was actually not the son of Imam Riḍā (‘a). This group had no evidence for their slanderous claims, and so their only argument was that Imam Jawād (‘a) had a different skin tone from Imam Riḍā (‘a). They said: “Amongst us, there has never existed an Imam that was wheat (brown) complexioned.” Imam Riḍā (‘a) told them: “He is my son.” They said: “The Prophet of Islam (ṣ) arbitrated using the science of facial recognition (physiognomy)”¹⁵⁵; therefore

¹⁵² Kulaynī, *al-ʿUṣūl Min al-Kāfī*, Second Edition, Tehran, Maktabah Ṣadūq, 1381 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 320.

- Ṭabarsī, *ʿIlām al-Warāʾ Bi-ʿIlām al-Hudā*, Third Edition, Tehran, Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Islāmīya, p. 346.

¹⁵³ ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā al-ʿIrbilī, *Ibid*, p. 142.

- Tastarī, *Ibid*, p. 316.

¹⁵⁴ Qazwinī, Sayyid Kāzim, *Al-Imām al-Jawād Min al-Mahd ʿIl al-Laḥd*, Beirut, Muʾassasat Balāgh, 1408 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 337.

¹⁵⁵ Considering the matter of physiognomy as an authentic science from the Prophet (ṣ) was a claim made by this group but it was never accepted as such by Imam Riḍā (a). If the Imam (a) accepted their suggestion in bringing such an individual, it was perhaps because he knew that in conclusion, it would clear the matter up and show the group the weakness of their claim.

Physiognomists were people who would determine the lineage of individuals from the similarity of their body parts (such as the shape of their feet, hands, face, etc.), and they played an important role in the Arab society of that time. The Shia scholars have considered the teaching, learning, and the gaining of money from this field to be unlawful (*Ḥarām*). Some from the Shia scholars have considered this matter to be unequivocally unlawful, while others have considered it unlawful if it involves a *Ḥarām* action or if it results in the presentation of a definite answer (meaning that an

such an individual (physiognomist) must arbitrate between you and us." The Imam ('a) replied: "Then go and call someone (if you please), but I will do no such thing; also, remember to not tell them for what reason you have called them..."

One day, in accordance to a previous appointment, the uncles, brother, and sisters of Imam Riḍā ('a) went to an orchard and sat down, while Imam Riḍā ('a)— adorned in loose-fitting wool clothing and a hat, shovel in hand, was busy working in the orchard. It seemed as if he was an ordinary worker and did not have any relationship with the people sitting in the orchard.

Then Imam Jawād ('a) was brought there as well and the physiognomists were asked to identify his father from among the people in the gathering. The physiognomists all said: "The father of this child is not present in this gathering; however, this individual is his father's uncle, this one is his own uncle, and this is his aunt. If his father is present here, it can be no other than that individual who is in the orchard carrying the shovel on his shoulder, for the ankles of these two individuals (the son and the father) are of the same type." At this time, Imam Riḍā ('a) joined the group. The physiognomists altogether stated: "This is his father."

At this point, 'Alī ibn Ja'far, the uncle of Imam Riḍā ('a), stood up from his place and kissed Imam Jawād ('a), saying: "I witness before God that you are my Imam."¹⁵⁶ In this manner, the plots of those working against the imamate were defeated, and the truth was made manifest for all to see.

answer is given as being the absolute truth). For further information, refer to: Muqqaram, Sayyid 'Abd al-Razzāq, *A Passing Glance At The Life of Imam Jawād (a)*, translated by Doctor Parvīz Lawlāvar, Mashhad, The Foundation For Islamic Researchers Ostāne Qudse Razavi, 1370 Hijri Shamshi, p. 35.

¹⁵⁶ Kulaynī, *al-Üsül Min al-Kāfi*, Second Edition, Tehran, Maktabah Şadūq, 1381 Hijri Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 322.

- Muqqaram, Sayyid 'Abd al-Razzāq, *A Passing Glance At The Life of Imam Jawād (a)*, translated by Doctor Parvīz Lawlāvar, Mashhad, The Foundation for Islamic Researchers Ostāne Qudse Razavi, 1370 Hijri Shamshi, p. 36.

The Young Imam

Since Imam Jawād ('a) was the first Imam to reach the position of the imamate in his childhood, the first question which comes to mind when looking at his life is how a child was able to take up the heavy responsibility of the imamate of the Muslim nation. Is it possible for a human being to have reached such a high level of perfection at such a young age? If such a thing is possible, did it have precedence in previous nations?

In answering these questions, we must pay attention to the following points: It is true that the maturation of the human mind and body have a typical timeline. As this timeline progresses, the body and mind are said to have reached the point of potential completion and perfection. In spite of this, what is there to prevent God, who is all-wise and all-knowledgeable, to make this maturation process shorter in duration for certain specific individuals, and to have them reach perfection before the normal time has been reached? In society, from the beginning of time all the way until present times, there have always been individuals who have been made exempt from this principle, and through the favor and special attention of God, they have reached a position of leadership at a very young age.

To clarify this issue further, let us look at some of these special cases from history:

1- The Quran has mentioned the case of Prophet Yaḥyā ('a), his prophetic mission, and the fact that he reached the rank of prophethood during his childhood. The Quran says: "To his son came the command): 'O Yaḥyā, take hold of the Book with might": and we gave him wisdom even as a youth"¹⁵⁷

Some commentators have considered the word 'ḥukm' in the above verse to mean intelligence and insight, while others are of the position that: 'The meaning of this word is

¹⁵⁷ Surah Maryam, Verse 12.

prophethood.' Further evidence of this view is found in a tradition narrated in the book *Ūṣūl al-Kāfi*. This tradition is narrated from the Fifth Imam ('a), where the Imam ('a), in regards to the meaning of 'ḥukm' in the above mentioned verse, cites the prophethood of Prophet Yaḥyā ('a) from the period of his childhood and says: "After the passing of Zakariyā ('a), his son Yaḥyā ('a) inherited the book and the wisdom from him and this is the same (matter) where God says in the Quran: 'O Yaḥyā, take hold of the Book with might': and we gave him wisdom even as a youth"¹⁵⁸

2- Although it typically takes twelve months for a child to begin speaking, we know that Prophet Jesus ('a) began to speak from the very first days of his birth. He went on to use his powers of speech to defend his mother from slanderous accusations and he used logic to refute the words of his enemies. This was while such a feat of eloquent speech almost always belongs exclusively to the realm of mature human beings and not children. The Quran has narrated his words in the following verses: "He (Jesus) said: 'I am indeed a servant of Allah: He has given me revelation and made me a prophet, and He has made me blessed wheresoever I be, and has enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live, (He has made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing o. miserable..."¹⁵⁹

Therefore, it is clear that before the time of the Imams ('a), other divine figures were, likewise, given this blessing and this matter cannot be considered as specific to members of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

¹⁵⁸ *Ūṣūl al-Kāfi*, Tehran, Maktabah al-Ṣadūq, 1381 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 382.

¹⁵⁹ Surah Maryam, Verses 30-32.

From some traditions, it is understood that at the time that Jesus (a) spoke, he was a Nabī (prophet) but did not yet possess the position of Risālah. Then at the age of seven, he reached the position of Risālah (messengerhood). Therefore, it is not implausible that the Imams (a) could reach the position of the imamate at a similar age (Kulaynī, *Ūṣūl al-Kāfi*, Tehran, Maktabah al-Ṣadūq, 1381 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 1, p. 382).

The Words of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) on This Issue

When researching the lives of the Imams (‘a), it becomes evident that this question was raised during their time as well, and it was specifically asked during the time of Imam Jawād (‘a). The Imams (‘a) answered this question with the same reasoning we mentioned above. As an example, let us look at three traditions which have been narrated on this subject:

1- ‘Alī ibn Asbāt, one of the companions of Imam Riḍā (‘a) and Imam Jawād (‘a), has narrated: “One day I went to visit Imam Jawād (‘a), and during the visit I stared intently at the face of the Imam (‘a), in order that I could commit his features to memory, so that when I returned to Egypt, I could describe the Imam (‘a) to his devotees.”¹⁶⁰

At that very moment, Imam Jawād (‘a), as though he had read my mind, sat in front of me and said: ‘Oh ‘Alī ibn Asbāt, what God has done in regards to the imamate is similar to what he has done in regards to prophethood. God has said in regards to Yaḥyā (‘a): “...We gave him the command of prophethood even as a youth.” In regards to Joseph (‘a) he says: “When Joseph attained full manhood, we gave him power (prophethood) and knowledge: thus do we reward those who do right.”¹⁶¹ And with respect to Moses (‘a), he says: “When he reached full age and was firmly established (in life), we bestowed on him wisdom (prophethood) and knowledge.”¹⁶²

Therefore, just as it is possible for God to give knowledge and wisdom to an individual at the age of forty, it is possible for that same wisdom to be given to an individual while he is a child.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ From the words of ‘Alī ibn Asbāt, we can understand that the Imam (a) also had followers in Egypt and they wished to know what he looked like.

¹⁶¹ Surah Yūsuf, Verse 22.

¹⁶² Surah Qasas, Verse 14.

¹⁶³ Kulaynī, *al-Usūl Min al-Kāfi*, Second Edition, Tehran, Maktabah Ṣadūq, 1381 Hijri Qamari, vol. 1, p. 384 and 494. In addition, refer to: Qazwini, Sayyid Kāzim, *al-Imām al-Jawād Min al-Mahd ‘Il al-Laḥd*, First Edition, Beirut, Mu‘assasat Balāgh, 1408 Hijri Qamari, p. 232.

2- One of the companions of Imam Riḍā ('a) said: "In Khurāsān, we were in the presence of Imam Riḍā ('a). One of the people present there said: 'Oh my master, if (God forbid), something were to happen (to you), who should we follow and refer to?' The Imam ('a) said: 'To my son, Abū Ja'far.'¹⁶⁴ At this point, that individual felt that Imam Jawād ('a) was too young, so Imam Riḍā ('a) added: 'God made Jesus, the son of Mary, a prophet, a messenger, and the possessor of a new religious law at an even younger age than the age of Abū Ja'far.'¹⁶⁵

3- Imam Riḍā ('a) said to one of his companions, Mu'amar ibn Khallād: "I have seated Abū Ja'far in my place and have appointed him as my successor. We are a family in which our youth inherit everything their elders encompass."¹⁶⁶

An Ideological Whirlpool

In spite of all that was mentioned with respect to divine leadership at a young age, the issue of Imam Jawād's ('a) age was not yet fully resolved for some of the people. Not only was it not yet resolved for many of the ordinary Shias, but it was also something which was debated and discussed by some of the scholars and notables of the time. Therefore, after the martyrdom of Imam Riḍā ('a), and the initiation of Imam Jawād's ('a) imamate, the issue of his age manifested itself as an unprecedented problem for the Shia, particularly amongst

- Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt al-Waṣīya*, Najaf, *Manshūrāt al-Maṭba'at al-Ḥaydariya*, 1374 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 211.

¹⁶⁴ Abū Ja'far is the agnomen of Imam Jawād (a); he is called Abū Ja'far al-Thānī (the second) to differentiate between him and Imam Bāqir (a).

¹⁶⁵ Kulaynī, *Ibid*, vol. 1, p. 322 and 384.

- Shaykh Mufid, *al-Irshād*, Qum, *Maktabah Baṣīratī*, p. 319.

- Ṭabarsī, *Ilām al-Warā Bi'ilām al-Hudā*, Third Edition, Tehran, *Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya*, p. 346.

¹⁶⁶ Shaykh Mufid, *Ibid*, p. 318.

- Ṭabarsī, *Ibid*, p. 346.

- 'Alī ibn 'Isā al-'Irbilī, *Ibid*, p. 141.

- Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Tehran, *al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya*, 1395 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 50, p.

- Kulaynī, *Ibid*, p. 320.

the masses.

Ibn Rustam Ṭabarī, a scholar from the fourth century Hijrī, has written about Imam Jawād (‘a) that: “When he reached approximately six years of age, Ma’mūn murdered his father and the Shias fell into a state of confusion; differences of opinion appeared amongst them. The people considered Abū Ja‘far’s age as being too young and the Shias in other cities were also in a confused state.”¹⁶⁷ In order to alleviate this situation, the Shias organized meetings and gatherings with Imam Jawād (‘a), in order to test him and thereby obtain certainty that he possessed the knowledge of the Imams (‘a). In these assemblies, they asked the Imam various questions and when they heard definitive and clear answers, they became assured of his imamate and gained certainty in this matter.

Historians have written that: “When Imam Riḍā (‘a) passed away in the year 202 (Hijrī), Abū Ja‘far was seven years old. Subsequently, in Baghdad and in the rest of the cities, differences of opinion came about among the people. Rayyān ibn Ṣalt, Ṣafwān ibn Yaḥyā, Muḥammad ibn Ḥakīm, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ḥajjāj, and Yūnus ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, along with a group of the notables and trustworthy Shia individuals, gathered in the house of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ḥajjāj, in Baraka’ Zalzal, a neighborhood in Baghdad.¹⁶⁸ When they gathered there, they began to cry and weep out of sorrow for the Imam (‘a) when... Yūnus said to them: ‘Leave this crying and weeping, we must see who is capable of the responsibility of the imamate. Until this child (Abū Ja‘far (‘a)) has grown, who must we ask about our affairs?’

At this point, Rayyān ibn Ṣalt stood up, squeezed Yūnus’s throat, and began to hit him on the face, while angrily saying: ‘In front of us, you profess faith, while you have hidden your

¹⁶⁷ Dalā’il al-Imāmah, Third Edition, Qum, Manshūrāt al-Rāḍī, 1363 Hijrī Shamshī, p. 204.

¹⁶⁸ In some sources, the name has been narrated as Baraka Zalūl, but Zalzal is the correct name.

doubt and hypocrisy? If his imamate is from God, then even if he is one day old, he will be like a one hundred year old man. And if he is not from God, then even if he is one hundred years old, he will be like an ordinary individual. Deliberate upon this matter.' At this point, the other participants in the gathering began to reprimand Yūnus for what he had said."¹⁶⁹

At that time, the season of the Ḥajj pilgrimage was near and seventy individuals from the jurists and scholars of Baghdad and other cities departed for the pilgrimage. They headed towards the city of Medina with the intention of seeing Abū Ja'far ('a). Upon arriving in Medina, they went to the house of Imam Ṣādiq ('a)— which was empty— and sat on a large carpet which was there. 'Abdullah ibn Mūsā, the uncle of Imam Jawād ('a), then entered the house and sat at the heart of the gathering. One man stood up and said: "This is the son of the Messenger of God; whoever has any questions should ask him." A few people posed various questions and 'Abdullah ibn Mūsā gave them incorrect responses...¹⁷⁰ The Shias became perplexed and saddened, while the jurists became upset and stood up, intending to leave. They said: "If Abū Ja'far was able to answer our questions 'Abdullah would not have come here and would not have given these incorrect answers."

At this point, a door in the house opened and a servant by the name of Muwaffaq came out. He faced the gathering

¹⁶⁹ Yūnus (and also Ṣafwān ibn Yahyā) are from the 'Ashāb al-Jamā', meaning that the Imami scholars agree on the authenticity and correctness of their traditions. Yūnus possessed a very high degree of spirituality and was praised by the Imams (a). The scholars of Rijāl have also praised him. In spite of these characteristics, when such a high-ranking personality says such a thing, it shows the regrettable state of the common people. Moreover, due to his characteristics, some of the modern day scholars do not believe that his words were literal. They explain that it is possible his intention was to test the people at the gathering, so that they could become known. (Muqqarām, Sayyid 'Abd al-Razzāq, *A Passing Glance At The Life of Imam Jawād (a)*, translated by Doctor Parvīz Lawlāvar, Mashhad, The Foundation For Islamic Researchers Ostāne Qudse Razavī, 1370 Hijri Shamshi, p. 110).

¹⁷⁰ The historians have recorded the details of the questions and answers, but due to the scope of this book, we have not mentioned them.

and said: "Abū Ja'far is coming." The Imam ('a) entered the room and everyone welcomed him. He then sat down and all the people became silent. Then the people began to ask their questions from the Imam ('a). They all heard definitive and clear answers to their questions and so they became immensely relieved and joyful. They prayed for the Imam ('a) and said: "Your uncle, 'Abdullah, gave certain religious rulings (which were incorrect)." The Imam ('a) said: "Uncle, it is heavy in the eyes of God that tomorrow you will stand in front of him and it will be said to you: 'While in the Ummah (religious community) there existed someone more knowledgeable (than you), why did you give them religious rulings without knowledge?'"¹⁷¹

Ishāq ibn Ismā'il, who was with this group, has said: "I had written down ten questions in a letter to ask the Imam ('a). At that time, my wife was pregnant. I said to myself: 'If he answers my questions, I will request that he prays for me, so that God gives me a son.' When the people began to ask their questions, I also took my letter and stood up, in order to ask my questions. As soon as the Imam ('a) saw me, he said: 'Oh Ishāq, give him the name of Aḥmad. After this incident, my wife gave birth to a boy and I named him Aḥmad.'¹⁷²

These meetings, discussions, and debates caused the Shias to gain full certainty in the imamate of Imam Jawād ('a).¹⁷³ All the doubts and questions which had previously existed, were dispelled and the people were put at complete ease.

¹⁷¹ Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1395 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 50, p. 98-100.

- Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ibn Rustam, Dalā'il al-Imāmah*, Third Edition, Qum, *Manshūrāt al-Rādi*, 1363 Hijrī Shamsī, p. 404-406.

- Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt al-Waṣīya*, Najaf, *Manshūrāt al-Maṭba'at al-Ḥaydariya*, 1374 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 213-215. With slight differences in wording.

¹⁷² Mas'ūdī, *Ibid*, p. 215.

¹⁷³ Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1395 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 50, p. 90.

- Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt al-Waṣīya*, Najaf, *Manshūrāt al-Maṭba'at al-Ḥaydariya*, 1374 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 210.

- Shaykh Mufid, *al-Ikhtiṣās*, edited by: 'Alī Akbar Ghaffārī, *Manshūrāt Jama'at al-Mudarisin Fi Ḥawzah al-'Ilmiyah Qum Muqadissah*, p. 102.

The Debates of Imam Jawād

Since Imam Jawād ('a) was the first of the Imams to reach this rank¹⁷⁴ during his childhood, there followed many interesting and animated discussions and debates between him and the people. The main reason behind these discussions was that, due to his age, the imamate of Imam Jawād ('a) was not yet fully proven for many Shias. Therefore, in order to gain certainty and to examine the Imam ('a), they asked him a great deal of questions on a variety of issues.

Furthermore, during that time, the Mu'tazilah sect—supported and assisted by the government—had grown in strength and had reached the peak of its power and influence. Not only were they backed by the government both financially and politically, but the government worked to suppress other ideologies which were opposed to them, making them even stronger.

As mentioned previously, the Mu'tazilah believed excessively in the powers and abilities of the human intellect. The followers of this sect would take all religious principles and assess them with the human intellect; whatever issues their intellects agreed upon, they would accept; everything else was then rejected. Additionally, since the matter of leadership by a young child could not be rectified by their sense of intellect, they proceeded to ask extremely complicated and difficult questions in order to defeat the Imam ('a) and show his unworthiness for the rank of the imamate.

In spite of this, Imam Jawād ('a) easily answered their questions, clearly and definitively, and all of their doubts and misgivings about his imamate were quickly allayed. In fact, the misgivings of the people were allayed to such a degree that with the coming of the next Imam (Imam Hādī ('a)), who also happened to be a child when he was appointed to this

¹⁷⁴ After the Imam (a), his son 'Alī Hādī (a) reached the imamate at an even younger age. After him, Imam Mahdī (a) reached this position when he was no older than 5 years in age.

position, the issue of his young age did not create any problems whatsoever. At this point, it had become clear to all that childhood does not have any effect whatsoever on the validity or invalidity of being appointed to this divine rank.

The Debate with Yahyā ibn Aktham¹⁷⁵

When Ma'mūn left Tūs for Baghdad, he wrote a letter to Imam Jawād ('a), inviting him to Baghdad. This invitation was similar to the invitation that his father, Imam Riḍā ('a) had received, in the sense that it was not an optional invitation, but rather, a compulsory one. The Imam ('a) had no choice but to accept and so, a few days after entering Baghdad, Ma'mūn invited him to his palace. There, in the palace, Ma'mūn proposed that the Imam ('a) marry his daughter, Umm al-Faḍl. The Imam ('a) remained silent in the face of the proposal.¹⁷⁶ Ma'mūn decided to take this silence as an affirmation, and he began to make plans for the marriage.

Ma'mūn decided to organize a wedding celebration, but the spread of this news created a proverbial bombshell amongst the 'Abbāsids. The 'Abbāsids organized a meeting and said to Ma'mūn in protest: "What is this? Now that 'Alī ibn Mūsā has passed away and the caliphate has returned back to the 'Abbāsids, you wish again to return it to the family of 'Alī? Know that we will not allow this to happen. Have you forgotten the deep-seated animosity between our

¹⁷⁵ Yahyā was one of the famous scholars during the rule of Ma'mūn, the Abbasid caliph. His fame extended to both the masses and the notables. He possessed such an exceptional level of expertise in jurisprudence that Ma'mūn, although he himself was very knowledgeable, favored Yahyā and entrusted him with managing the affairs of the nation. In essence, all of the affairs of the vast Islamic nation were under his supervision. He was considered to be so close to Ma'mūn that no one else even came close to his position.

In spite of his immense knowledge, Yahyā did not possess much in the way of spiritual rank. He had sought after knowledge for the sake of worldly position, fame, and superiority to others. Whenever a scholar would meet with Yahyā, he would ask him a number of questions on various topics until that individual was forced to admit his lack of knowledge in front of him.

¹⁷⁶ In the coming pages, we will discuss this marriage of Imam Jawād (a) in more detail.

households?" Ma'mūn asked them: "What is it that you want?" They replied: "This youth is a child and he possesses nothing in knowledge and learning." Ma'mūn said: "You are not familiar with this family. Their youth and their elders alike, possess great knowledge." The Abbasids did not accept this. Ma'mūn then said: "Since you do not accept my words, just test him— Bring a knowledgeable scholar which you yourselves accept, so that he can debate with him in order that the truth of my words becomes clear."

The 'Abbāsids selected Yaḥyā ibn Aktham and Ma'mūn organized a gathering for testing the knowledge of Imam Jawād ('a). When the time for the gathering came and everyone had assembled, Yaḥyā turned towards Ma'mūn and asked: "Do you give me permission to ask this young man a question?" Ma'mūn replied: "Seek permission from himself." Yaḥyā asked for permission from Imam Jawād ('a). Imam Jawād ('a) said: "Ask whatever you wish." Yaḥyā then asked: "What do you say of an individual who is Muḥrim (in the state of Iḥrām during the Ḥajj pilgrimage) and has hunted an animal while in that state?"¹⁷⁷

Imam Jawād ('a) replied: "Has this individual killed the animal in the 'Hill' (outside the limits of the Ḥarām) or inside the Ḥarām? Did he know the rules on hunting while in Iḥrām, or was he ignorant? Did he kill the animal on purpose or on accident? Was he a free man or a slave? Was he a minor or was he mature (bāligh)? Was this the first time he committed such an action or has he done so several times before? Was it a bird or another type of animal? Was the animal small or large? Does he have no regret for what he has done, or is he regretful? Did he hunt in the night or in the daytime? Was he in the Iḥrām of 'Umrah or the Iḥrām of Ḥajj?"

¹⁷⁷ One of the actions which is forbidden (*Ḥarām*) for those who are in a state of Iḥrām during the Ḥajj or 'Umrah pilgrimage is hunting. In matters of jurisprudence, the jurisprudence of Ḥajj is particularly complicated. Therefore, it is highly probable that Yaḥyā ibn Aktham asked a question regarding Ḥajj because he assumed that the Imam (a) would become confused and be left unable to give him a proper answer.

Yahyā was astonished at all of these secondary issues which the Imam (‘a) had presented. His face revealed that he was at a loss for words, and when he tried to speak, he began to stammer. His compromised state was so evident that all the people present fully understood his weakness and incapacity. At this point, Ma’mūn said: “God, I thank you for this blessing that exactly what I thought would take place, has now taken place.” Then he looked at his relatives and family members, and said: “Now do you comprehend what you were not willing to accept before?”¹⁷⁸

The Ruling of Hunting in the Various States of Iḥrām

Then after some further discussions, the majority of the people left, and only those who were very close to the caliph remained. Ma’mūn turned towards the Imam (‘a) and said: “May my life be given in your place, please explain the various rulings for the individual who hunts under the conditions that you mentioned, so that we may gain this knowledge.” Imam Jawād (‘a) replied: “Of course. If a Muḥrim (in the state of Iḥrām at the Ḥajj pilgrimage) hunts in the Hill (outside of the Ḥarām)¹⁷⁹ and the hunted animal is a large bird, then its expiation is one sheep and if he kills it in the Ḥarām, the expiation is doubled. If he kills the chick (child) of a bird outside of the Ḥarām, the expiation is one lamb which has just stopped weaning and if it is killed in the Ḥarām, then both a lamb and the price of that chick must be given. If the hunted animal is wild (undomesticated), in the

¹⁷⁸ Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1395 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 50, p. 75-76.

- Qazwīnī, Sayyid Kāzim, *al-Imām al-Jawād Min al-Mahd 'Il al-Laḥd*, Beirut, Mu‘assasat Balāgh, 1408 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 168-172.

The narrator of this is Rayyān ibn Shabīb, the uncle of Mu‘taṣim, who was one of the companions of Imam Ridā (a) and Imam Jawād (a); he was considered a trustworthy narrator of tradition. (Qazwīnī, *Ibid*, p. 168; Shaykh Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, Qum, Maktabah Baṣīratī, p. 319-321; Ṭabarsī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, Najaf, al-Maṭba‘at al-Murtadāwiya, 1350 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 245; Mas‘ūdi, *Ithbāt al-Waṣīya*, Najaf, Manshūrāt al-Maṭba‘at al-Ḥaydarīa, 1374 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 216)

¹⁷⁹ The Ḥarām is the holy sanctuary within which the Kaaba is located.

case that it is a zebra, its expiation is one cow; if it is an ostrich, its expiation is one camel; if it is a deer, then its expiation is one sheep, and if any of these are killed inside the Ḥarām, the expiation is doubled.

If the Muḥrim individual engages in any actions which necessitate a sacrifice (qurbānī), and if he is in the Iḥrām of Ḥajj, he must sacrifice the animal (the qurbānī) at Minā, and if he is in the Iḥrām of ‘Umrah, he must sacrifice the animal in Mecca. The expiation of hunting is the same for a knowledgeable (‘Ālim) individual and an ignorant (Jāhil) individual; but if it is done intentionally, then— in addition to the obligation of the expiation— he has sinned. However, in the case of it being committed by error, there is no sin. The expiation of a free man is his own responsibility, whereas the expiation of a slave is upon his owner. There is no expiation required for a minor (child), but it is obligatory on one who is physically mature (bāligh). The punishment of the hereafter is removed from one who is regretful of his actions, but the one who is not regretful will be punished.”¹⁸⁰

The Supreme Judge is Checkmated!

Ma’mūn said: “Well done, oh Abū Ja’far, may God give you all that is good. Now it would be appropriate if you ask Yaḥyā ibn Aktham a question in the same manner that he asked you a question.” Imam Jawād (‘a) asked Yaḥyā: “Should I ask?” Yaḥyā replied: “May my life be given in exchange for yours, it is your prerogative to ask; if I am able, I will answer, and if not, I will learn from you.” Imam Jawād (‘a) then asked: “Explain to me (the situation) of a man who in the morning looks at a woman and his look is unlawful. As the day progresses, that lady becomes lawful to him (she becomes his wife). When the day reaches noontime, again she becomes unlawful to him. When it becomes evening time, she becomes

¹⁸⁰ Majlisi, *Ibid*, p. 77.

- Qazwīnī, *Ibid*, p. 174.

- Shaykh Mufid, *al-Irshād*, p. 322.

lawful to him again. When the sun sets, she becomes unlawful to him. When the time of 'Ishā' (nightfall) comes, she becomes lawful to him, and when midnight approaches, she becomes unlawful to him. With the break of the dawn, she again becomes lawful to him. What kind of a woman is this and through what means does she become lawful and unlawful to him in such a manner?"

Yaḥyā replied: "I swear by God that I do not know any way of solving this question— I do not know how she becomes lawful and unlawful to him so many times over. If possible, please acquaint us with the answer."

Imam Jawād ('a) said: "This woman was the slave of someone. In the morning, a (male) stranger looks at her and the look is an unlawful one. As the day goes on, the man buys the slave from her owner and he becomes lawful to her. When noon arrives, he sets her free and becomes unlawful to her. When evening comes, he marries her (through nikah) and becomes lawful to her. During the evening time (Maghrib), he does *Zihār* to her¹⁸¹ and she becomes unlawful to him. When the time of 'Ishā' arrives, he pays the expiation of *Zihār*, and she becomes lawful to him again. At midnight, he divorces her and she becomes unlawful to him, and with the break of dawn, he returns to her and the woman becomes lawful to him again."¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ *Zihār* is when a man says to his wife: "Your back is the same to me as my mother, sister, or daughter." In this case, the expiation of the *Zihār* must be given before the wife becomes lawful to the husband again. *Zihār*, during the age of ignorance, was considered as a type of divorce and resulted in an irrevocable divorce. Islam repudiated this and made obligatory only the afore mentioned state of unlawfulness and the giving of some money as expiation (*kaffarah*).

¹⁸² Majlisī, *Ibid*, p. 78.

- Qazwīnī, *Ibid*, p. 175.

- Shaykh Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, p. 322.

Manifestations of the Imam's Vast Knowledge

1- The Ruling of the Imam and the Defeat of the Court Scholars

Imam Jawād ('a), in addition to his debates, would use other means to show the intellectual poverty of the government-paid scholars and jurists. He would use these opportunities to expose their weakness, while also showing the people the divine knowledge the Imams ('a) possessed and proving to them the legitimacy of the imamate. One such time was when he gave his jurisprudential ruling on cutting the hand of a thief.

Zurqān,¹⁸³ who was a close friend of Ibn Abī Du'ād,¹⁸⁴ has narrated: "One day, Ibn Abī Du'ād was returning from a gathering with Mu'taṣim (the 'Abbāsīd caliph), while he was in a state of deep distress. I asked him why he was in this state and Ibn Abī Du'ād replied: 'Today, I wished that I had died twenty years ago.' Zurqān asked him: 'Why... What has happened?' He said: 'Because of what happened to me in the gathering of Mu'taṣim, thanks to Abū Ja'far (Imam Jawād ('a)).' Zurqān asked him: 'What exactly took place?' Ibn Abī Du'ād said: 'An individual confessed to a robbery and requested that the caliph (Mu'taṣim) apply the punishment and purify him of his sin. The caliph gathered all of the jurists and also called upon Muḥammad ibn 'Alī (Imam Jawād ('a)). He asked us: 'Where should the hand of a thief be cut off from?' I replied: 'From the wrist.' He asked: 'What is your reasoning behind this?' I said: 'This is because the meaning of the hand, as revealed in the verse of Tayammum, has mentioned:¹⁸⁵ '...rub therewith your faces and hands (upto the wrists).'"

A group of the jurists concurred with me and said:

¹⁸³ Zurqān was the title of Abū Ja'far, a narrator of tradition.

¹⁸⁴ Ibn Abī Du'ād was the judge of Baghdad during the caliphates of Ma'mūn, Mu'taṣim, and Mutawakīl 'Abbāsī. (Majlisī, Ibid, p. 5, Footnotes).

¹⁸⁵ Surah Mā'idah, Verse 5.

'The hand of a thief must be cut at the wrist, while another group of them said that it is necessary that the arm be cut at the elbow.' When Mu'taṣim asked them the reason behind this, they said: 'The meaning of the hand has been explained in the verse of ablution, where it says: "...wash your faces, and your hands (and arms) to the elbows..."'¹⁸⁶.

At this point, Mu'taṣim turned towards Imam Jawād ('a) and asked: 'What is your opinion on this matter?' Imam Jawād ('a) replied: 'They have given their opinions, therefore exempt me.' Mu'taṣim insisted and swore that the Imam ('a) must give his opinion. Imam Jawād ('a) said: 'Since you swore an oath, I will give my ruling. Both of the opinions mentioned are in error, for only the fingers of a thief must be cut and the rest must be left (alone).' Mu'taṣim asked Imam Jawād ('a) his reasoning behind this. The Imam ('a) said: 'The Prophet of God (ṣ) has said: "Prostration finds fulfillment (is performed) upon seven parts of the body: the face (the forehead), the two palms of the hands, the two knees, and the two feet (the two big toes of the feet)." Therefore, if the hand of a thief is cut off from the wrist or from the elbow, then no hand is left for him so that he can perform the prostration of the prayer. Also, God, the Most High, has said: 'And the places of worship (the seven parts which prostration is performed with) are for Allah (alone): So invoke not any one along with Allah,'¹⁸⁷ and that which is for God, is not cut

¹⁸⁶ Surah Mā'idah, Verse 5.

¹⁸⁷ The word Masjid here means a place of prostration (Sajdah). Since mosques and houses of God are places where the foreheads come into contact with the ground, they are thus considered places for prostration. The forehead and the other six parts of the body which come into contact with the ground, are considered places of prostration. Based on this meaning, this tradition uses the word al-Masājid in the sense of the seven body parts which are used to prostrate with. In two other traditions from Imam Ṣādiq (a) narrated in the books of Kāfi, and in another tradition in the Commentary of 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm Qummī, the word al-Masājid is used in this same sense (the seven body parts). This meaning has also been narrated from Sa'id ibn Jubayr, Zayjāj, and Farrā' as well. We should keep in mind that if this sense of the word al-Masājid (meaning the seven body parts) was incorrectly used by the Imam (a), the rest of the jurists who were present in Mu'taṣim's gathering would have mentioned it and pointed out its error. Since none of the individuals present in the gathering mentioned this point, it shows that it was a well-established view which they all agreed

Mu'taṣim approved of Imam Jawād's ('a) answer and ordered that the fingers of the thief be cut (and we were thus shamed in front of those present at the gathering). Right then and there, I wished for death."

2- The Fabricators of Tradition Are Disgraced!

It has been narrated that after Ma'mūn wedded his daughter to Imam Jawād ('a),¹⁸⁹ there was a gathering in which Ma'mūn, Imam Jawād ('a), Yaḥyā ibn Aktham, and many others were present. Yaḥyā said to the Imam ('a): "It has been narrated that Gabriel visited the Prophet (ṣ) and said: 'Oh Muḥammad, God has sent you his greetings (salaam) and says: I am satisfied with Abū Bakr, ask him whether he is satisfied with me? What is your opinion on this tradition?'"¹⁹⁰

Imam Jawād ('a) replied: "I am not a denier of Abū Bakr's virtue, but for the individual who narrates this tradition, they must also keep in mind another tradition from the Prophet of Islam (ṣ) during the Ḥajjat al-Widā, where he said: 'The people who attribute lies to me have become large in number and after me, they will also be large in number. Whoever attributes a lie to me intentionally, his place shall be the fire. Therefore, when a tradition from me is narrated to you, compare it with the Book of God and the Sunnah; take whatever conforms with the Book of God and my Sunnah, and leave that which is in opposition to the Book of God and the Sunnah.'" Imam Jawād ('a) added: "This tradition (in regards to Abū Bakr) is not in conformance with the Book of

upon. Even if we assume that they did not agree upon it, it was still a point which they considered a distinct possibility. (The Ninth Leader, Imam Muḥammad Taqī, Mu'assasah Dar Rāhe Ḥaq, p. 26-29; Narrated from Tafsīre Ṣāfi, vol. 2, p. 752; Tafsīr Nūr al-Thaqalayn, vol. 5, p. 440; Tafsīre Majma'ah al-Bayān, vol. 10, p. 372).

¹⁸⁸ Surah Jinn, Verse 18.

¹⁸⁹ We will discuss this marriage in more detail in the coming pages.

¹⁹⁰ 'Allāmah Amīnī, in the book al-Ghadīr (vol. 5, p. 321) has written: This is a prevarication and is from the fabricated traditions of Muḥammad ibn Bābshādh.

God, for God has said: 'It was we who created man, and we know what dark suggestions his soul makes to him: for we are nearer to him than (his) jugular vein.'¹⁹¹ Was the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of Abū Bakr hidden from God that he asked this from the Prophet (ﷺ)? This is logically impossible."

Yahyā then asked: "It has been narrated: 'Abū Bakr and 'Umar on this earth are similar to what Gabriel is in the heavens.' Imam Jawād ('a) said: 'In regards to this tradition, we must look into it in detail, for Gabriel and Michael are two esteemed angels in the presence of God. They have never committed any sins nor have they left the obedience of God for even a second. Yet Abū Bakr and 'Umar were polytheists, and however much they became Muslims after the advent of Islam, much of their lives had been spent in polytheism and idol worship. Therefore, it is impossible that God would liken them to Gabriel and Michael.'"

Yahyā then asked: "Likewise, it has been narrated that: 'Abū Bakr and 'Umar are the two masters of the elders of paradise.'¹⁹² What do you say about this tradition?" Imam Jawād ('a) said: "It is impossible for this tradition to be authentic, for the people of paradise are all young, and thus no old individual would be found amongst them (so that Abū Bakr and 'Umar can be their master). This tradition was fabricated by the Umayyids in opposition to the tradition narrated by the Prophet of Islam (ﷺ) in regards to Ḥasan ('a) and Ḥusayn ('a), where he said: 'Ḥasan and Ḥusayn are the two masters of the youth of paradise.'"

Yahyā then asked: "It has been narrated that 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb is the light of the people of paradise." Imam Jawād ('a) said: "This is also impossible, for in paradise there are the

¹⁹¹ Surah Qāf, Verse 16.

¹⁹² 'Allāmah Amīnī has considered this tradition to be the fabrication of Yahyā ibn 'Anbasah and has determined it to be inauthentic. This is because Yahyā was a known fabricator of traditions. (Al-Ghadir, vol. 5, p. 322). Dhahabī has also considered Yahyā ibn 'Anbasah a fabricator of traditions and a liar. (Mizān al-'Itidāl, First Edition, Researched by 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī, Dār 'Ilhā' al-Kutub al-'Arabīa, 1382 Hijrī Qamari, vol. 4, p. 400).

esteemed angels of God, Adam, Muḥammad (ṣ), and all of the prophets and individuals which God has sent. How is it that paradise is not lit by their light, but it is (instead) lit by the light of ‘Umar?”

Yaḥyā then asserted: “It has been narrated that Sakīnah speaks with the voice of ‘Umar (that whatever ‘Umar says, he says on behalf of an angel).” Imam Jawād (‘a) said in response: “I am not a denier of ‘Umar’s virtue, but Abū Bakr, in spite of being more virtuous than ‘Umar, would say (the following) while on the pulpit: I have a Satan who causes me to deviate; whenever you see me deviated from the right path, then return me back to it.”

Yaḥyā said: “It has been narrated that the Prophet (ṣ) said: ‘If I had not been commissioned to prophethood, then surely ‘Umar would have been commissioned (to it).’”¹⁹³ The Imam (‘a) replied: “The Book of God (the Quran) is more truthful than this tradition. God in his book has said: ‘And remember we took from the prophets their covenant: As (We did) from thee: from Noah...’”¹⁹⁴ From this verse, it is explicitly understood that God has taken a covenant from the prophets (‘a); therefore, how is it possible that they would change their covenant? Not one of the prophets committed polytheism not even to the extent of the blink of an eye. How is it possible that God would commission someone with prophethood, who has spent the better part of his life in polytheism? In addition to this, the Prophet (ṣ) said: ‘When Adam was in between the spirit and the body (meaning he had not yet been created), I became a prophet.’”

Again Yaḥyā said: “It has been narrated that the Prophet (ṣ) said: ‘The revelation was never interrupted from me, except when I thought it had been revealed upon the family of Khaṭṭāb (the father of ‘Umar), meaning that the prophethood had been transferred to them.’” Imam Jawād

¹⁹³ ‘Allāmah Amīnī has proven that the narrators of this tradition were liars (al-Ghadīr, vol. 5, p. 312 and 316).

¹⁹⁴ Surah Aḥzāb, Verse 7.

(‘a) said: “This is also impossible, for there is no chance that the Prophet (ﷺ) would doubt his own prophethood; God has said: ‘Allah chooses messengers from angels and from men...’¹⁹⁵ (meaning, through the medium of divine selection, there is no longer any room for self-doubt as to the status of a prophet).”

Yahyā said: “It has been narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: ‘If (divine) torment were sent down, no one would be saved from it but ‘Umar.’” Imam Jawād (‘a) said: “This is, once again, impossible, for God said to the Prophet of Islam (ﷺ): ‘But Allah was not going to send them a penalty while you were amongst them; nor was He going to send it while they could ask for pardon.’¹⁹⁶ Therefore, as long as the Prophet (ﷺ) was in the midst of the people and as long as the Muslims ask for forgiveness, God will not punish them.”¹⁹⁷

The Personality and Characteristics of Imam Jawād from the Perspective of the Scholars

The discussions and debates of Imam Jawād (‘a) and the resolution of various intellectual and jurisprudential problems inspired the amazement and admiration of Islamic scholars and researchers. These scholars included those from both the Shia and Sunni schools of thought, and each one of them would praise Imam Jawād (‘a) in a myriad of ways. For example, Sibṭ ibn Jawzī has said: “He followed the method of his father in knowledge, piety, asceticism, and generosity.”¹⁹⁸

Ibn Ḥajar Haytamī has written: “Ma’mūn chose him as his son in law, for in spite of his youth, he was superior to all

¹⁹⁵ Surah Ḥajj, Verse 75.

¹⁹⁶ Surah Anfāl, Verse 33.

¹⁹⁷ Ṭabarsī, al-Iḥtijāj, Najaf, al-Maṭba‘at al-Murtaḍāwiya, 1350 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 2, p. 247-248.

- Majlisī, Biḥār al-Anwār, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1395 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 50, p. 80-83.

- Qarshī, Sayyid ‘Alī Akbar, The Family of Revelation, First Print, Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyah, 1368 Hijrī Shamsi, p. 644-647.

¹⁹⁸ Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣ, Najaf, Maktabah al-Ḥaydarīa, 1383 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 359.

the scholars with respect to knowledge, awareness, and forbearance.”¹⁹⁹ Shablanjī has said: “Ma’mūn was constantly in awe of him, for in spite of his youth, he had shown his virtue, knowledge, and perfection of intellect.”²⁰⁰ Shaykh Mufīd and Fattāl Nayshābūrī have described the Imam (‘a) with the following words: “Ma’mūn was utterly captivated by him, for he saw that in spite of his young age, he had reached such a high rank in knowledge, wisdom, culture, and intellectual perfection that no one from the intellectual masters of the day could come close to reaching him.”²⁰¹

Jāhīz ‘Uthmānī Mu’tazilī, who was one of the opponents of the family of Imam ‘Alī (‘a),²⁰² has mentioned Imam Jawād (‘a) as one of the ten Ṭālibis, adding: “Each one of them is learned, ascetic, worshipful, courageous, forgiving, pure, and noble. Some of them were caliphs, and some nominees for the caliphate, and up to ten of them directly descended from one another. They are: Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Mūsā ibn Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī. No family, neither from the Arabs, nor the Ajams, possesses such a noble lineage.”²⁰³

A Conspiratorial Marriage Offer

As explained in the chapter on the life of Imam Ridā (‘a) Ma’mūn became entangled in a series of political difficulties. In order to find a solution from his problems, he decided to

¹⁹⁹ Al-Sawā‘īq al-Muḥriqah, Second Edition, Cairo, Maktabah Cairo, 1385 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 205.

²⁰⁰ Nūr al-Absār, Cairo, Maktabah Mashhad al-Ḥusaynī, p. 161.

²⁰¹ Al-Irshād, Qum, Maktabah Baṣīratī, p. 319.

- Rawḍat al-Wā‘iẓīn, First Edition, Beirut, Mu‘assasat al-‘Alamī Lil Maṭbū‘āt, 1406 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 261.

²⁰² Jāhīz lived in Baṣrah and possessed great knowledge. He was a contemporary of Imam Jawād (‘a), and wrote many books on the sciences and branches of knowledge which were prevalent during his time. After the death of Imam Jawād (a), he also lived through the era of Imam Jawād’s (a) son.

²⁰³ Murtaḍā al-‘Āmūlī, Ja‘far, A Look At The Political Life of Imam Jawād (a), translated by Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusaynī, Qum, The Office of Islamic Publications affiliated to Jamī‘ah Mudarisīn, 1365 Hijrī Shamshī, p. 106. (Narrated from the Collection of Jāhīz).

position himself nearer to the family of the Prophet. In order to do this, he imposed the successorship of the caliphate on Imam Riḍā ('a); through this plan, he hoped to bring about the successful application of a multi-faceted, long-term political strategy.

However, the 'Abbāsids became very upset at Ma'mūn's policy; they felt that there was a possibility that the caliphate would end up leaving the 'Abbāsīd family and be transferred to the Alawīs. Thus, they stood in opposition to Ma'mūn and only calmed down when Imam Riḍā ('a) was poisoned to death. Only after this, did they once again become satisfied with Ma'mūn's rule.

When Ma'mūn poisoned the Imam ('a), he tried his best to keep the matter a secret; he did not want the public to find out what had taken place. Keeping in line with this, he made a pretense of grieving and mourning over the Imam's ('a) death. When all was said and done however, the Alawīs found out that Ma'mūn had killed Imam Riḍā ('a), and they became extremely angry. Once again, Ma'mūn felt that his caliphate was in danger and that his grip on power had weakened. In order to rectify the situation, he devised yet another plan. He decided to marry his daughter to Imam Jawād ('a), the son of Imam Riḍā ('a). In this way, he wanted to gain all the benefits which he had sought when he appointed Imam Riḍā ('a) to the successorship.

With this newly devised plan, Imam Jawād ('a) was brought from Medina to Baghdad in the year 204 Hijrī, which was approximately one year after the martyrdom of Imam Riḍā ('a). After some preliminary discussions in a gathering with Yaḥyā ibn Aktham, Ma'mūn offered his daughter Umm al-Faḍl in marriage to Imam Jawād ('a).

Ma'mūn's Motives

History shows us that this marriage, which Ma'mūn insisted so much upon, was strictly political in nature. Ma'mūn had several goals which he hoped to secure through

this marriage, namely:

1- By sending his daughter into the house of the Imam ('a), Ma'mūn would always have him under close scrutiny. He would have a window into the Imam's ('a) life. Ma'mūn's daughter, in turn, played her role well in passing along information, and the books of history testify to her spying activities.

2- Ma'mūn imagined that through this marriage, the Imam ('a) would be pulled towards luxury and self-indulgence, with all of its corresponding corruption and debauchery. He thought that if such a thing took place, the Imam ('a) would surely be brought down in the eyes of the public, and he would thus be deprived of his infallible position as an Imam ('a).

3- Through this marriage, the Alawīs would be deprived of any excuse to rise up against him, and Ma'mūn could position himself as their benefactor and supporter.²⁰⁴

4- Ma'mūn's fourth goal was the general deception of the masses. He would sometimes say: "I initiated this marriage so that Abū Ja'far ('a) would have a child by my daughter and so that I could be the grandfather of a child that is from the lineage of the Prophet and 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib." Fortunately, this stratagem of Ma'mūn never bore any fruit and his daughter never gave birth to any child.²⁰⁵ All of Imam Jawād's ('a) children were from his other wife.

These were all goals which Ma'mūn sought to reach from the marriage of his daughter with Imam Jawād ('a). Now we have to look into the reasons behind Imam Jawād's ('a) consent to this union. It is very clear that Imam Jawād ('a) was fully aware of Ma'mūn's true intentions in forcing the

²⁰⁴ The Ninth Leader, Imam Muḥammad Taqī, Dar Rāhe Ḥaq Institute, Qum, 1366 Hijri Shamshi, p. 38.

²⁰⁵ Ibn Wāḍih, Tārikh Ya'qūbī, Najaf, al-Maṭba'at al-Haydariya, 1384 Hijri Qamari, vol. 3, p. 189.

- Ibn Shahr Āshūb, Manāqib Āli Abī Ṭālib, Qum, Mu'assasat al-Intishārāt 'Alāmah, vol. 4, p. 380. Ma'mūn had previously wed another of his daughters to the Eighth Imam (a) and in that case, likewise, he did not achieve what he was seeking.

issue of this marriage. He also knew that Ma'mūn was the same individual who had murdered his father, Imam Riḍā ('a). It seems that Imam Jawād's ('a) consent was primarily due to the pressure which Ma'mūn exerted on him. Such a marriage was only to the advantage of Ma'mūn and definitely not to the benefit of Imam Jawād ('a).

Another possibility is that perhaps consenting to this marriage presented an obstacle to the murder of the Imam ('a) at the hands of Ma'mūn, as well as helping to prevent the suppression of the Shia leaders and companions of the Imam ('a). Therefore, one possibility is that this action was similar to that of 'Alī ibn Yaqtīn, when he accepted the viziership of Hārūn and was able to exert influence in the court of the caliph to the benefit of the Shia.

Husayn Makārī, one of the companions of Imam Jawād ('a), has been quoted as saying: "I had the honor of visiting Imam Jawād ('a) in Baghdad, and I saw his manner of living. When I saw this, I thought to myself that now that the Imam ('a) is living in this comfortable manner, he will never return to the city of his birth, Medina. For a moment, the Imam ('a) lowered his head, and then raised it. The color of his face had turned pale with sorrow. He said: 'Barley bread and rough salt in the mosque of the Prophet is dearer to me than (the condition that you see me living in).'"²⁰⁶

The Imam ('a) did not end up staying in Baghdad, and he returned to Medina with his wife Umm al-Faḍl, where he would live until the year 220 Hijrī.

Imam Jawād's Connection with the Shia

Imam Jawād ('a), in spite of all the limitations he was placed under, still maintained his contact with the Shia

²⁰⁶ Rāwandī, *al-Kharā'ij wa al-Jarā'ih*, edited by Ḥajj Shaykh Asadullah Rabbānī, Muṣṭafāwī Publications, vol. 1, p. 344.

- Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, Tehran, al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1395 Hijrī Qamarī, vol. 50, p. 48.

- Qazwīnī, Sayyid Kāzim, *al-Imām al-Jawād Min al-Mahd 'Il al-Laḥd*, Beirut, Mu'assasat Balāgh, 1408 Hijrī Qamarī, p. 152.

through means of various deputies and representatives. The Imam ('a) dispatched these deputies throughout the lands controlled by the 'Abbāsids, and through their activities, helped to prevent the breakup and disintegration of the Shia. His deputies were active in many of the provinces, including Ahwāz, Hamedan, Sīstān, Bost,²⁰⁷ Ray, Wāsiṭ, Baghdad, as well as the traditional centers of the Shia, namely Kūfah and Qum.

The Imam ('a) gave permission to his supporters to take hold of various influential government positions. Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl ibn Bazī' and Aḥmad ibn Ḥamzah Qummī are two examples of such individuals who reached very high positions in the 'Abbāsīd government. Another example is that of Nūḥ ibn Darrāj, the judge of Baghdad, who later on became the judge of Kūfah.

Others from among the Shia, such as Ḥusayn ibn 'Abdullah Nayshābūrī, became the governor of Bost and Sīstān, and Ḥakam ibn 'Alīyā Asadī became the governor of Bahrain. Both of these individuals would give their khūms dues to Imam Jawād ('a), indicating the strength of their relationship with the Imam ('a).²⁰⁸ As mentioned before when 'Alī ibn Asbāṭ came to visit the Imam ('a), he gazed at his face with concentration in order that he could memorize the Imam's ('a) exact features, and describe him to his followers and companions in Egypt. This is an indication that even in Egypt, Imam Jawād ('a) had followers and supporters.

It has also been mentioned that: "The expansion of the influence of the Shias during that time period in Egypt came about as a result of the migration of Kufan narrators of

²⁰⁷ Abū al-Fidā' (672-721 Hijrī Qamarī) writes: "Bost is located next to the river Hindmand. It is one of the cities of Sajistān (Sīstān Province). It is a large and prosperous city containing many palm groves and vineyards. The distance from Bost to Ghaznah is 14 stations." (Taḥdīm al-Baldān, translated by Abū al-Muḥammad Āyatī, Bunyāde Farhangī Irān Publications, 1349 Hijrī Shamshī, p. 391).

²⁰⁸ Doctor Ḥusayn, Jāsim, The Political History of the Ghaybah of the 12th Imam (a), translated by Sayyid Muḥammad Taqī Ayatollāhī, First Print, Tehran, Amir Kabir Institute, 1367 Hijrī Shamshī, p. 79.

tradition to that land, and their subsequent activities there. These included individuals such as: Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ash'ath, Aḥmad ibn Sahl, Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī Miṣrī, and Ismā'īl ibn Mūsā al-Kāẓim."²⁰⁹

The late Shaykh Kulaynī has narrated that Imam Jawād ('a), in relation to a request he received from one of the Shias of Bost and Sistān, dispatched a letter to the governor of that province and instructed that he not give that individual a hard time in the collection of his taxes. The governor, who was one of the followers of the Imam ('a), not only refrained from collecting the man's taxes, but also announced that as long as he was governor, the man would be exempt from paying them entirely. In addition to this, he ordered that the man be apportioned a permanent pension.²¹⁰

The Intellectual School of Imam Jawād

One of the main features of the lives of the Imams ('a) was their methodology in teaching and educating the people. Each of the great Imams ('a) engaged in teaching and training a number of students; the Imams' knowledge and science spread in part through these students. At the same time, it must be said that the social and political conditions during the various periods of each of the Imams ('a) were not equal. For example, during the time of Imam Bāqir ('a) and Imam Ṣādiq ('a), the social conditions were relatively favorable, and for this reason, the narrators and students in the school of Imam Ṣādiq ('a) numbered 4,000.

However, from the time of Imam Jawād's ('a) imamate until the time of Imam Ḥasan Askarī ('a), due to the unfavorable circumstances and severe political pressure from the caliphs, the scope and breadth of the Imams' activities was comparatively limited. If we were to simply look at the raw number of students and narrators of these later Imams

²⁰⁹ Doctor Jāsīm Ḥusayn, *Ibid*, p. 78.

²¹⁰ *Furū' Kāfi*, vol. 5, p. 111.

and compare that with, for example, the number of students of Imam Ṣādiq ('a), we would see a significant disparity. Hence, we should not be surprised when we read that the narrators and companions of Imam Jawād ('a) were only 110 individuals,²¹¹ and that only 250 traditions were narrated from the Imam ('a) in total.²¹² On the one hand, the Imam ('a) was under close political scrutiny by the caliphs, and on the other hand, he was martyred at a very young age. According to historians, he was no older than 25 years at the time of his martyrdom.

In spite of these factors, these companions and narrators included many brilliant scholars and personalities. These included individuals such as: 'Alī ibn Mahziyār, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Naṣr Baznaṭī, Zakariyā ibn Ādam, Muḥammad ibn Ismā'il ibn Bazī', Ḥusayn ibn Sa'id Ahwāzī, and Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Khālīd Barqī. These individuals were each considered as heavyweights in their respective intellectual and jurisprudential fields, and some of them had numerous works to their name.

Moreover, the narrators of Imam Jawād ('a) are not only found from among the Shia; Sunni narrators and scholars have transmitted much Islamic knowledge and teachings from Imam Jawād ('a) as well. For example, Khaṭīb Baghdādī has narrated traditions directly from Imam Jawād ('a).²¹³

Likewise, 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Akḥḍar Janābadhī, in his text *Ma'ālim al-'Itrat al-Ṭāhirah*,²¹⁴ as well as other writers, such

²¹¹ Shaykh Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, First Edition, Najaf, *Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Haydariya*, 1381 Hijri Qamarī, p. 397-409. The compiler of *Masnad al-Imām al-Jawād* has noted that Imam Jawād's ('a) companions and students were 121 in number (Aṭṭarīdī, Shaykh Azizullah, *Masnad al-Imām al-Jawād*, Mashhad, al-Mu'tamar al-'Alami Lil Imām al-Riḍā ('a), 1410 Hijri Qamarī) while Qazwīnī has concluded that they were 257 in number (Qazwīnī, Sayyid Kāzim, *al-Imām al-Jawād Min al-Mahd 'Il al-Laḥd*, Beirut, Mu'assasat Balāgh, 1408 Hijri Qamarī).

²¹² Mr. Aṭṭarīdī, in his *Masnad al-Imām al-Jawād*, has counted the total number of traditions narrated from Imam Jawād ('a) in various fields, such as jurisprudence, ideology, ethics, and others.

²¹³ *Tārīkh Baghdādī*, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabiya, vol. 3, p. 54 and 55.

²¹⁴ Amīn, Sayyid Muḥsin, *A'yān al-Shī'ah*, Beirut, Dār Ta'aruf Lil Maṭbū'āt, 1403 Hijri Qamarī, vol. 2, p. 35.

as: Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn Thābit, Abū Ishāq Thalabī, and Muḥammad ibn Mandah ibn Mahrbadh, have all narrated traditions from Imam Jawād (‘a) in their books of history and commentary.²¹⁵

The Martyrdom of Imam Jawād

Ma’mūn passed away in the year 218 Hijrī, and his brother Mu’taṣim succeeded the caliphate. In 220 Hijrī, Mu’taṣim brought the Imam (‘a) to Baghdad, in order to keep a close eye on his activities. There, he attended a gathering organized by Mu’taṣim, in order to decide what the correct Islamic punishment for a thief would be (i.e. at what point the hand should be cut off). In this gathering, the judge of Baghdad (Ibn Abī Du’ād) as well as others, were embarrassed in front of the caliph as a result of the Imam’s ruling.

After the passing of a few days, Ibn Abī Du’ād visited Mu’taṣim and out of a sense of jealousy and hatred, said to the caliph: “Since I wish the best for you, I wanted to tell you that what took place a few days ago was not in your government’s best interest. During that gathering, you selected the religious edict of Abū Ja’far (Imam Jawād (‘a)) over that of all the other scholars and government officials. This is while at least half of the Muslims consider Abū Ja’far as their legitimate caliph and consider you a usurper to his position. The news of this has spread amongst the people and has shown itself to be a decisive proof in regards to his position amongst his followers.”

Mu’taṣim, who was rather sensitive on this matter, was provoked to action by these words of Ibn Abī Du’ād, and decided to kill the Imam (‘a). By way of one of his agents, he had the Imam (‘a) poisoned, and thus the Imam (‘a) was martyred.²¹⁶ At the time of his martyrdom, Imam Jawād (‘a)

²¹⁵ Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Qum, al-Ṭab‘at ‘Ilmiyah*, vol. 4, p. 384.

²¹⁶ ‘Ayāshī, *Kitāb al-Tafsīr*, edited by Ḥajj Sayyid Hāshim Rasūlī Mahallātī, *Qum, al-Ṭab‘at al-‘Ilmiyah*, vol. 1, p. 320.

- Majlisī, *Ibid*, p. 7.

was no older than 25 years in age.²¹⁷

We have not mentioned the particulars of the martyrdom of Imam Jawād (a) due to the constraints of space. For further information, please refer to:

- Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Manāqib Āli Abi Tālib*, Qum, Mu'assasat al-Intishārāt 'Alāmah, vol. 4, p. 380; Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 50, p. 8 and 9; Fattāl Nayshābūrī, *Rawḍat al-Wa'izīn*, p. 267.

²¹⁷ Shaykh Mufid, *al-Irshād*, Qum, Maktabah Baṣīratī, p. 326.

- Majlisī, *Ibid*, p. 7.

- Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il al-'Imāmah*, Third Edition, Qum, Manshūrāt al-Rāḍī, 1363 Hijrī Shamshī, p. 208.